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*FRANCIS JEFFREY*

*From the engraving by B. W. Crombie, published in 1847*

# JEFFREY'S LITERARY CRITICISM

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION

BY

D. NICHOL SMITH

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# INTRODUCTION

JEFFREY was persuaded in the leisure of his old age to reprint a selection from his two hundred essays. The volumes entitled *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review* preserve but a small part of what he had written during his busy editorship. But they contain the work by which, on full deliberation, he was willing to be judged. He made few changes in his text. Sometimes he added a phrase or a quotation, more frequently he omitted a quotation, but he never modified his view or his argument. The only novelty in the reprint is the occasional footnote in which he looks back to the time when the essays were written.

A selection from Jeffrey's writings must respect his own choice, and in this volume, which endeavours to represent his literary criticism within the compass of three or four of his longer essays, all is taken from the republication. But it may be doubted if any selection smaller than his own can give an adequate impression of his powers. There are no great passages in Jeffrey, and there is not one single great essay. When he wins his way to appreciation, he wins it step by step. His work is remarkably uniform in

quality, and it is cumulative in effect. He may not engage our attention, he may even arouse opposition; just as in real life his friendships were sometimes retarded by the gay precision of his manner and the extreme facility of his talk. But till we have found that he chooses to deal with all manner of subjects, and deals with them competently, we cannot hope to understand the reputation which he enjoyed in his own day. Macaulay, who had studied the essays to some purpose as they appeared, declared on reading them in the collected edition that the variety and versatility of Jeffrey's mind seemed to him more extraordinary than ever; 'take him all in all, I think him more nearly an universal genius than any man of our time.' And Carlyle was not actuated by gratitude when he said in his *Reminiscences* that Jeffrey was 'regarded universally as a man of consummate penetration and the *facile princeps* in the department he had chosen to cultivate and practise', and added as his own opinion that 'it is certain there has no critic appeared among us since who was worth naming beside him'.

Jeffrey cannot now regain his older reputation. It owed too much to political sympathy or personal regard. His Whig friends relied on his courage and tact in argument, and those who met him in the law-courts or at the supper-parties of Edinburgh were drawn to him by qualities which he showed too sparingly in the *Review*. Once the reforms for which

he fought had been accepted by the nation as a matter of course, and once his ready wit and unassuming kindness were only a memory, he came to be judged by his opinions on the poetry of his contemporaries. As a politician he had moved with public opinion, and had helped to shape it, as a critic he had not favoured some of the newer currents in literature, and had hoped to check them: and the politician was forgotten and the critic was remembered. But literary criticism was not the chief part of his work for the *Review*. The *Review* itself was but a small part of his day's work. He was first and foremost a lawyer. No advocate at the Parliament House in Edinburgh had a bigger practice. He was recognized as equally good at arguing a point of law and swaying a jury. He was unanimously elected Dean of the Faculty of Advocates. As Lord Advocate he looked after Scottish interests in the parliament that passed the Reform Bill. Then, at the age of sixty, he accepted a seat on the Scottish bench, and was by common repute an excellent judge. The wealth that gave him Craigcrook, his estate on the slope of Corstorphine Hill, two or three miles to the west of Edinburgh, and commanding from the higher ground what is still one of the finest views of the city, came to him, not from his writings, but from his practice at the bar. Jeffrey bought Craigcrook about the same time as Scott bought Abbotsford, and he too built, and planted, and added new fields to round off his pro-

perty. But he never needed to have recourse to his pen 'to make the matter easy'.

The *Edinburgh Review* was started while Jeffrey was still waiting for his practice. For some time he thought of abandoning the law for literature. 'I should like to be the rival of Smith and Hume, and there are some moments (after I have been extravagantly praised, especially by those to whose censure I am more familiar), when I fancy it possible that I shall one day arrive at such a distinction.' But this elation is not frequent in the correspondence of his early years as an advocate. He speaks of his prospects as slow, obscure, and philosophical starvation; and he thinks of joining the English bar, or going to India, or settling as a grub in London. All the time he was preparing himself for the *Review* as if he had foreseen it. While still a self-conscious and lonely lad, he had acquired the habit of writing essays on whatever interested him, and making abstracts of what he read, and he had set himself to imitate 'the style and manner of the principal persons who have exhibited their abilities in periodical and short essays', his chief models being Johnson, Addison, Mackenzie, and Steele. When he read to the Speculative Society of Edinburgh his papers on 'Nobility', 'Effects derived to Europe from the Discovery of America', 'The Authenticity of Ossian's Poems', 'Metrical Harmony', and 'The Character of Commercial Nations', he announced his later work still more

clearly. He sent a few articles to the *Monthly Review*, one of them on Southey's *Thalaba*.[1] But by this time

[1] Cockburn names three articles by Jeffrey in the *Monthly Review*. 'He had already got several papers published in the existing journals. Some of them, though not specified, are alluded to in his letters, but (so far as I know) only three of them can be authenticated. Two of them are on Whiter's *Etymologicon Magnum*, which were published in June and July 1802, in the *Monthly Review*. He describes these in a letter to his brother (1st August, 1802) as "too elaborate, but quite sound in argument". The third was a discussion of *Thalaba*, which he sent to that journal before the *Edinburgh Review* was resolved upon, though by some accident it was not published there till November, which was subsequent to the appearance of his article on *Thalaba* in the *Edinburgh*' (*Life of Jeffrey*, i. 127, 8).

The manuscript notes by Ralph Griffiths, the publisher and editor of the *Monthly Review*, in his private copy, now in the Bodleian Library, enable us to obtain a complete list of Jeffrey's contributions.

June 1802. Art. I, *Etymologicon Magnum.*
July 1802. Art. IX, *Etymologicon Magnum* (concluded).
November 1802. Art. II, *Thalaba.*
Art. 20, *Poems and Ballads* (anon., pub. Mawman).
Art. 21, *Union : a Poem* (anon., pub. Chapple).
Art. 22, *Remonstrance : with other Poems*, by Catherine Hood.
December 1802. Art. VI, *Herman and Dorothea : a Poem, from the German of Goethe*, by Thomas Holcroft.
Art. 38, *Poems*, by Wm. Boscawen, Esq.
Art. 40, *Select Translations from Homer and Horace*, by Gilbert Thompson.
January 1803. Art. 32, *The Peasant's Fate : a Rural Poem*, by William Holloway.
Art. 33, *Thoughts on Happiness : a Poem* (anon., pub. Rivingtons).
Art. 41, *The Poetical Works of Eaglesfield Smith, Esq.*
Art. 50, *The Friend of Women*, translated from the French of Bourdier de Villemert, by Alexander Morrice.

The four contributions distinguished by Roman numerals are main articles, varying in length from eight to over twenty pages. The others are short notices in the section headed 'Monthly Catalogue'.

The *Edinburgh Review* had been planned before the middle of March 1802, and Jeffrey began his first article for it on April 9 (*Memoirs of Francis Horner*, 1843, i. 185). His thirteen contributions to the *Monthly* were all published after this, and the last of

he had met Sydney Smith. They were drawn together by their opposition to the reigning politics of Edinburgh and their belief in each other's career. Jeffrey was exhorted to think extremely well of his powers of writing, and—not the least proof of friendship—was helped to rid his style of Scotticisms. He was also provided with his great opportunity. But for Smith the chances are that he would have continued to nurse vague literary ambitions which would have been gradually choked by his legal practice. He got to work on the *Review* while he had still more time on his hands than he cared for, and once having started it, he could carry it on so that neither it nor his practice interfered with the other.

The story of the founding of the *Edinburgh Review* is told by Sydney Smith in a short paragraph of the preface to his collected works, and further details are easily accessible, especially in the biography of Jeffrey by his lifelong friend, Henry Cockburn, and in the memoirs of Francis Horner. The suggestion appears to have been dropped casually by Smith in an hilarious conversation. It was taken up with great enthusiasm in the spirit of sport. In its origin the *Edinburgh Review* was in every way a young man's venture. Smith was aged thirty and Jeffrey twenty-eight, and their chief collaborators were younger, among them Horner and Brougham, both aged twenty-

them did not appear till the *Edinburgh* was in its second number. The first number was to have come out in June, but was delayed till October 10.

three. They meant to enjoy the fun of causing a flutter in Scottish Toryism, and they found zest in looking upon themselves as 'conspirators'. They had no suspicion how well they were to hit the public taste. Jeffrey—who was never sanguine, but counteracted his fears by a power of solid work—implies in one of his letters that it would drag on for as many as four numbers only because they were bound for that time to the booksellers. But within six years the government were to favour the establishment of the *Quarterly Review* to check their influence. Jeffrey was formally appointed editor for the second number, and he continued in office till the ninety-eighth was in preparation. Sydney Smith suggested the *Edinburgh Review*, but Jeffrey made it.

All these facts have an unmistakable bearing on the work of Jeffrey as a critic. The *Review* was primarily an instrument for political and social reform. As he said to Scott at a juncture in their relations, 'The *Review* has but two legs to stand on. Literature is no doubt one of them, but its right leg is Politics.' In the opening numbers the literary criticism was more or less incidental, and much of it was evidently written as a relaxation, with the same daring and independence that was shown in the political articles, but with an uncertain sense of responsibility. As the *Review* proceeded, Jeffrey gradually learned his work and took it more seriously. There was little progression in his taste. He saw no change in himself

throughout all his life. When he republished his essays he recognized that there would be no purpose in arranging them in the order in which they were written. Yet there is no mistaking his growing consciousness of the weight of his opinion. Copleston's *Advice to a Young Reviewer, with a Specimen of the Art* (1807) was quite fair satire when it was written, but it would certainly not be justified by the selections given in this volume. To the last the ease and discursiveness of Jeffrey's manner ran some risk of descending into flippancy. He himself speaks in one of his later articles of 'our accustomed tone of levity'. But he was never so guilty of mere reckless cleverness as some of his collaborators. There was no cruelty in his nature. The unanimous testimony of his friends, as well as his own confession, is that he could not get on without affection; he craved it, he got it, and he showed it. But he was fond of his joke; he liked to tease; and he sometimes tried to tease at the wrong time.

And Jeffrey is the advocate in his literary criticism. He gets up his case quickly, he is never at a loss for a point nor for words to express it, and he has a precision and reasonableness of manner which are dangerously convincing to those who do not know all the facts. He had a real talent for seizing on the crucial passages in a book. His abstracts have still their use to those who are in a hurry, and his choice of quotations, though sometimes made with a purpose, will commonly

be found to have anticipated the more deliberate choice of the reading public. We recognize everywhere the fresh and active if not unbiased mind. He has the mental habits of the lawyer; he also carries into his criticism the methods of the law-courts. He addresses the grand jury of public opinion. 'The charge we bring against Lord Byron . . . this is the charge which we bring against Lord Byron': so he proceeds in one of his best passages, where the words seem to gain ease and vigour according as he believes that he is controlling the verdict. At other times, when the case is presumed to be closed, he comes forward to show that there are one or two points which should not be neglected. The great instance of this is his essay on Burns. The Scottish enthusiasm for the national poet, he says in effect, is no doubt very excellent, but if Burns be judged by the standard which is applied to other poets he will be found to have several peculiarities and faults, for which it is easier to find a cause than a legitimate apology. There is in Burns an undisciplined harshness of invective; there is a want of polish, or at least of respectfulness, in his gallantry; there is a contempt, or affectation of contempt, for prudence, decency, and regularity, and a belief in the dispensing power of genius and social feeling in all matters of morality and common sense, which is a 'most lamentable trait of vulgarity'; and there is the perpetual boast of his own independence. These points are all valid, as valid as the devil's advo-

cate can make them. Taken together, and by themselves, they give the false impression that Jeffrey's attitude to Burns was hostile. Indeed, throughout all his life he was generally supposed, in Scotland, to have made an uncalled-for attack; whereas he had only taken upon himself to adjust the balance of Scottish opinion. Jeffrey's inexhaustible vivacity made him too fond of argument. To cast doubt on what was accepted, or to find good in what was decried, was an intellectual exercise in which he was always ready to indulge. It helped him at the bar, but it has not helped his reputation as a judge of literature.

It was not to be expected that Jeffrey would like the poetry of Wordsworth. The world was too much with the critic who whetted his wits on the multiplicity of his occupations. His nimble mind required something definite to lay hold of, something to twist or fashion as it liked, or to use as a spring-board; but it found instead in Wordsworth a cushion of 'metaphysical sensibility and mystical wordiness'. Jeffrey would not accept the creed that our most vital knowledge is revealed to us by our feelings. He even did not try to understand it, but fastened his attention on what appeared to him to be the affectation of simplicity, the lack of incident, and the prevalence of the commonplace, and behind these was not at first prepared to seek. But when he came to review the *Excursion*, he had to acknowledge that here was not mere wanton experiment, but a profound conviction. His account

of the *Excursion* is his best piece of criticism on Wordsworth because he now recognized that there was a definite cleavage between them. It is a frank if somewhat facile statement of difficulties and objections by one who is not and can never be a Wordsworthian, and it has considerable value as such a statement, though its manner is still liable to cause irritation. There was much in the poem that he admired and quoted for praise—more than is commonly supposed. The poem which entirely eluded his logical grasp was the *White Doe of Rylstone*.

The republication of the reviews of the *Excursion* and the *White Doe* gave Jeffrey the opportunity, when he and Wordsworth were both enjoying the ease and the honours of old age, to look back upon his long quarrel and to give his final judgement:

'I can easily understand that many whose admiration of the *Excursion*, or the *Lyrical Ballads*, rests substantially on the passages which I too should join in admiring, may view with greater indulgence than I can do the tedious and flat passages with which they are interspersed, and may consequently think my censure of these works a great deal too harsh and uncharitable. Between such persons and me, therefore, there may be no radical difference of opinion, or contrariety as to principles of judgement. But if there be any who actually admire this *White Doe of Rylstone*, or *Peter Bell the Waggoner*, or the *Lamentations of Martha Rae*, or the *Sonnets on the Punishment of Death*, there can be no such ambiguity or means of reconcilement. Now I have been assured not only that there are such persons, but that almost all those

who seek to exalt Mr. Wordsworth as the founder of a new school of poetry, consider these as by far his best and most characteristic productions ; and would at once reject from their communion any one who did not acknowledge in them the traces of a high inspiration. Now I wish it to be understood, that when I speak with general intolerance or impatience of the school of Mr. Wordsworth, it is to the school holding these tenets, and applying these tests, that I refer.'

There could not be a better statement of Jeffrey's position. The note in which this passage occurs is, as a whole, admirable in its manliness and good-feeling, and it should not be forgotten in any estimate of his criticism.

Jeffrey thought Byron and Scott the two most original writers of the time. He saw the greatness of Byron in the first canto of *Childe Harold*, and proclaimed it with enthusiasm, till the author of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, who had not expected so impartial treatment, came to speak of him as 'grand patron', and vowed, whatever happened, always to respect his generosity. It was Jeffrey's foible, however, in criticizing his contemporaries, to give to his praises an offset of censure, and thus while we find unstinted admiration of all the qualities which are described in the general term 'force', we find also a growing insistence on Byron's faults and limitations. He regretted that Byron could draw only a single type of character, one in whom the greatest human gifts become the parents of misery. But his main charge was that in habitually misapplying his great talents

to glorify 'a fierce and magnificent misanthropy' Byron was guilty of more than an error in taste. His dissatisfaction came to a head on the publication of *Don Juan*. He knew the power of the poem, and he was not the man to assail it with 'priest-like cant'. His quarrel with it was that it excited good feelings only to accustom us to their speedy and complete extinction, that it held ennobling pursuits and disinterested virtues to be mere deceits or illusions—in a word, that instead of tearing the shams from life, it scoffed at life. All its brilliance could not keep Jeffrey from thinking that what was likely to defeat the chance of happiness was essentially unhealthy. Happiness was Jeffrey's own great quest, and he believed it was to be found by making the best of circumstances that were, on the whole, tolerably pleasant. He skimmed along the surface of life doing a vast amount of work of one kind or another, and finding pleasure all the way, and from the vantage-ground of success he showed much personal kindness, but perhaps too little sympathy with disquietude of thought. He annoyed Carlyle by advising him not to be 'so dreadfully in earnest'. And Carlyle found this consolation in his journal:

'The great business of man he, intellectually, considers, as a worldling does, *to be happy*. I have heard him say, "If folly were the happiest I would be a fool." Yet his daily life belies this doctrine and says, "Though goodness were the most wretched I would be good." In conversation he is brilliant, or rather sparkling,

lively, kind, willing either to speak or listen, and above all men I have ever seen ready and copious, on the whole exceedingly pleasant in light talk—yet alas ! light, light, too light. He will talk of nothing *earnestly*, though his look sometimes betrays an earnest feeling.'

There is some irritation here, yet there is truth in the portrait.

Jeffrey's last word in criticism of Byron was a comparison with Scott in which he developed the idea that the greatest authors reconcile us to life by showing the good in it, and so are moral teachers who help to make us 'happier and better'. How opposite to Byron's, he says, 'is the system, or the temper, of the great author of *Waverley*—the only living individual to whom Lord Byron must submit to be ranked as inferior in genius—and still more deplorably inferior in all that makes genius either amiable in itself, or useful to society ! . . . With the one we seem to share a gay and gorgeous banquet—with the other, a wild and dangerous intoxication.' Jeffrey was never in any doubt that the *Waverley Novels* were the greatest work of the age, and though he did not hesitate to point out minor blemishes, some of which are now the stock-in-trade of Scott's detractors, no critic gave them a more sincere and delighted welcome. But the point in Jeffrey's criticism of Scott that is best known now is that the review of *Marmion* was, on the whole, unfavourable ; and those who draw their knowledge of it—and of Scott's and Mrs. Scott's reception of it—from Lockhart, generally forget that a few pages

further on Lockhart describes Jeffrey's review of the *Lady of the Lake* as the best specimen of contemporary criticism on Scott's poetry. Jeffrey did not reprint the review of *Marmion,* but the review of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*—which is the earliest, and not the best, of the pieces given in this volume—shows clearly enough the nature of his difficulties. He was troubled by Scott's antiquarianism. He accepted the *Lay* as a romance composed by a modern minstrel, or such a romance as might have been written were that kind of poem still in vogue, but he felt that the attempt to revive the past had not been carried out consistently. The details of Border history, for which he suspected that few readers would share Scott's partiality, seemed to him not to be properly adjusted to the rest of the poem, and interfered with his appreciation of those passages of general interest in which the author speaks for himself or in the person of the minstrel. And the public's choice of quotations has supported Jeffrey's opinion, since the verses with which everybody is familiar are those which he praised. He preferred the *Lady of the Lake* to either of the earlier poems, if only for this reason, that he did not discover in it the same affectation of the antique. But he thought that Scott did not show himself as a giant till he wrote the *Waverley Novels.* In them he had subordinated his interest in the facts of history to his love of the enduring qualities of human nature.

Jeffrey was a convinced modern. He was interested

in the past only in so far as he saw its bearings on the present. Yet because he found fault with much in the literature of his time, or declared his preference for an older to a newer method, he has sometimes been regarded as a belated exponent of eighteenth-century taste. It is true that he chose as his early masters Addison and Johnson. It is true also that he admired the diction and versification of the *Vanity of Human Wishes* and the *Deserted Village*. But he gave it as his plain opinion that the writers who adorned the beginning of the eighteenth century had been eclipsed by his contemporaries, and in the very last literary article that he wrote during his editorship of the *Review* he even said that the age he lived in had a hundred times more poetry, and more true taste for poetry, than that which immediately preceded it. His very belief in the literary impulses of his time made him look with misgivings on some of their expressions. A good Whig might be a severe critic of Whig measures, and Jeffrey could find faults in a great literary movement without losing his faith in it. He mistrusted Scott's antiquarianism, and Wordsworth's mysticism, and Byron's misanthropy, and Southey's rhetorical diffuseness. In some cases time has been on his side. He was a modern in his sympathies, and yet he might without any inconsistency admire Crabbe for his pictures of 'the images and affections that belong to our *universal* nature', or declare in praise of Campbell that 'the most powerful and enchanting poetry is

that which depends for its effect upon the just representation of common feelings and common situations '.

His library showed that he had no interest in the past in itself. It was a very poor collection, made up largely of law books and review copies. There were few volumes of earlier date than the eighteenth century, and if there was a single rarity Jeffrey probably did not know, and as probably would not have cared. One of the clearest impressions left on Carlyle's mind, on paying his first call, was the tattery, ill-bound, or unbound condition of the books. Cockburn remarks on his ' slatternly habits ', and tells us that he despised binding, and did not value good printing. The inventory and valuation shows an unusual proportion of odd volumes and broken sets. His cellar, which contained well over three hundred dozens, and was already in repute when Lockhart wrote *Peter's Letters*, was distributed by the auctioneer; but his library was divided quietly among his friends. He had no interest in a book as a book. He did not care whose copy he read, and so long as the copy was readable he was satisfied. A book was to him only something to stimulate his mind and keep it working.

He was an intellectualist. This is the real explanation of his criticism. In private life he would give full play to sentiment. He confessed to a romantic temper, and we know from several sources—from Froude's *Life of Carlyle* and Harriet Martineau's *Autobiography*, as well as from his own letters—that

he too sought 'the endearing elegance of female friendship'. And Cockburn dwells on his delight in the beauties of the external world. 'The earth, the waters, and especially the sky, supplied him in their aspects with inexhaustible materials of positive luxury, on which he feasted to an extent which those who only knew him superficially could not suspect.' But in public, and certainly whenever he lifted his pen for the *Review*, he could move with ease and assurance only on the firm ground of cold reason. As a writer he belongs to the same family as Hume and Adam Smith. It was not an idle fancy of his youth to aspire to be their rival. No one will deny that he was far from reaching this ambition. He dissipated his abilities in the law-courts, on platforms, and throughout a hundred numbers of the *Review*. But he had the same type of mind. He himself found something French in Hume: the style, he said, was French,—a remark which may be questioned, but has often been repeated. Both Hume and Smith are supposed to show a French taste in their literary judgements. There is nothing French in the style of Jeffrey, nor is his taste French; but Carlyle found much in him that resembled his notion of Voltaire. These three Scottish intellectualists have a more remarkable association. The *Edinburgh Review* had been preceded in 1755–6 by another publication of like character and identical title. Adam Smith had been one of its projectors, and had contributed to it his first essays,

and Hume would have written for it had it not ceased with the second number. Jeffrey found circumstances more favourable for the establishment of a review, and what they had wished he was able to accomplish.

German literature he did not profess to understand, and believed to be responsible for the worst extravagances of his contemporaries. He could not 'enter into the spirit of this German idolatry', nor comprehend upon what grounds it rested, though friendship induced him latterly to throw open to it the pages of the *Review*. French literature he did understand and therefore admired. But he saw that the differences in national taste had to be accepted, and that nothing was to be gained by arguing about them.

'We humbly conceive it to be a complete and final justification for the whole body of the English nation who understand French as well as English, and yet prefer Shakespeare to Racine, just to state, modestly and firmly, the fact of that preference; and to declare that their habits and tempers, and studies and occupations, have been such as to make them receive far greater pleasure from the more varied imagery—the more flexible tone—the closer imitation of nature—the more rapid succession of incident, and vehement bursts of passion of the English author, than from the unvarying majesty—the elaborate argument—and epigrammatic poetry of the French dramatist.'

Jeffrey's intellectual habits may suggest a French type of mind; but his direct references to French literature plainly show, what is clear enough in all his essays, that his sympathies lay with the literature of his own country.

His view of the futility of trying to reconcile national tastes was repeated with greater emphasis by Hazlitt; and it was expanded by Carlyle. The opinions expressed in the early numbers of the *Edinburgh Review* have permeated English criticism to an extent not commonly recognized. No one was more indebted to them than Macaulay, who would have admitted his obligations, but has hidden them in the pageantry of his style. The accounts of the course of English literature express the view generally held during the nineteenth century. They err in overstating the French influence from the Restoration to the time of Cowper.

He shared the new enthusiasm for the Elizabethans, and helped to promote it. Next to Shakespeare, whom he never ceased to read, his favourite dramatist was Fletcher. 'Do but look to some passages of the Page in *Philaster*,' he writes, 'some of Aspatia in the *Maid's Tragedy*, and, above all, to the death of that noble boy in *Bonduca*, which I have always thought, or rather felt, to be the most pathetic passage in English poetry.' One of the most pleasing glimpses that we get of him in his old age is on a summer vacation by the firth of the Clyde, where he lounges about in the woods, and watches the yachts, and the new steam-vessels, and the eternal clouds playing with the peaks of Arran, and reads idle snatches of Shakespeare, and Fletcher, and Keats, and Shelley.

# THE ERA OF ELIZABETH AND JAMES

(August, 1811.)

*The Dramatic Works of* John Ford: *with an Introduction and Explanatory Notes.* By Henry Weber, Esq. 2 vols. 8vo, pp. 950. Edinburgh and London, 1811.

All true lovers of English poetry have been long in love with the dramatists of the time of Elizabeth and James; and must have been sensibly comforted by their late restoration to some degree of favour and notoriety. If there was any good reason, indeed, to believe that the notice which they have recently attracted proceeded from anything but that indiscriminate rage for editing and annotating by which the present times are so happily distinguished, we should be disposed to hail it as the most unequivocal symptom of improvement in public taste that has yet occurred to reward and animate our labours. At all events, however, it gives us a chance for such an improvement; by placing in the hands of many, who would not otherwise have heard of them, some of those beautiful performances which we have always regarded as among the most pleasing and characteristic productions of our native genius.

Ford certainly is not the best of those neglected writers—nor Mr. Weber by any means the best of their recent editors: but we cannot resist the opportunity which this publication seems to afford, of saying a word or two of a class of writers, whom we have long worshipped in secret with a sort of idolatrous veneration, and now find once more brought forward

as candidates for public applause. The era to which they belong, indeed, has always appeared to us by far the brightest in the history of English literature—or indeed of human intellect and capacity. There never was, any where, anything like the sixty or seventy years that elapsed from the middle of Elizabeth's reign to the period of the Restoration. In point of real force and originality of genius, neither the age of Pericles, nor the age of Augustus, nor the times of Leo X, nor of Louis XIV, can come at all into comparison: for, in that short period, we shall find the names of almost all the very great men that this nation has ever produced,—the names of Shakespeare, and Bacon, and Spenser, and Sydney,—and Hooker, and Taylor, and Barrow, and Raleigh,—and Napier, and Milton, and Cudworth, and Hobbes, and many others; —men, all of them, not merely of great talents and accomplishments, but of vast compass and reach of understanding, and of minds truly creative and original;—not perfecting art by the delicacy of their taste, or digesting knowledge by the justness of their reasonings; but making vast and substantial additions to the materials upon which taste and reason must hereafter be employed—and enlarging, to an incredible and unparalleled extent, both the stores and the resources of the human faculties.

Whether the brisk concussion which was given to men's minds by the force of the Reformation had much effect in producing this sudden development of British genius, we cannot undertake to determine. For our own part, we should be rather inclined to hold, that the Reformation itself was but one symptom or effect of that great spirit of progression and improvement which had been set in operation by deeper and more general causes; and which afterwards blossomed out into this splendid harvest of

authorship. But whatever may have been the causes that determined the appearance of those great works, the fact is certain, not only that they appeared together in great numbers, but that they possessed a common character, which, in spite of the great diversity of their subjects and designs, would have made them be classed together as the works of the same order or description of men, even if they had appeared at the most distant intervals of time. They are the works of Giants, in short—and of Giants of one nation and family ;—and their characteristics are, great force, boldness, and originality ; together with a certain raciness of English peculiarity, which distinguishes them from all those performances that have since been produced among ourselves, upon a more vague and general idea of European excellence. Their sudden appearance, indeed, in all this splendour of native luxuriance, can only be compared to what happens on the breaking up of a virgin soil,—where all indigenous plants spring up at once with a rank and irrepressible fertility, and display whatever is peculiar or excellent in their nature, on a scale the most conspicuous and magnificent. The crops are not indeed so clean, as where a more exhausted mould has been stimulated by systematic cultivation ; nor so profitable, as where their quality has been varied by a judicious admixture of exotics, and accommodated to the demands of the universe by the combinations of an unlimited trade. But to those whose chief object of admiration is the living power and energy of vegetation, and who take delight in contemplating the various forms of her unforced and natural perfection, no spectacle can be more rich, splendid, or attractive.

In the times of which we are speaking, classical learning, though it had made great progress, had by

no means become an exclusive study; and the ancients had not yet been permitted to subdue men's minds to a sense of hopeless inferiority, or to condemn the moderns to the lot of humble imitators. They were resorted to, rather to furnish materials and occasional ornaments, than as models for the general style of composition; and, while they enriched the imagination, and insensibly improved the taste of their successors, they did not at all restrain their freedom, or impair their originality. No common standard had yet been erected, to which all the works of European genius were required to conform; and no general authority was acknowledged, by which all private or local ideas of excellence must submit to be corrected. Both readers and authors were comparatively few in number. The former were infinitely less critical and difficult than they have since become; and the latter, if they were not less solicitous about fame, were at least much less jealous and timid as to the hazards which attended its pursuit. Men, indeed, seldom took to writing in those days, unless they had a great deal of matter to communicate; and neither imagined that they could make a reputation by delivering commonplaces in an elegant manner, or that the substantial value of their sentiments would be disregarded for a little rudeness or negligence in the finishing. They were habituated, therefore, both to depend upon their own resources, and to draw upon them without fear or anxiety; and followed the dictates of their own taste and judgement, without standing much in awe of the ancients, of their readers, or of each other.

The achievements of Bacon, and those who set free our understandings from the shackles of Papal and of tyrannical imposition, afford sufficient evidence of the benefit which resulted to the reasoning faculties from

this happy independence of the first great writers of this nation. But its advantages were, if possible, still more conspicuous in the mere literary character of their productions. The quantity of bright thoughts, of original images, and splendid expressions, which they poured forth upon every occasion, and by which they illuminated and adorned the darkest and most rugged topics to which they had happened to turn themselves, is such as has never been equalled in any other age or country; and places them at least as high, in point of fancy and imagination, as of force of reason, or comprehensiveness of understanding. In this highest and most comprehensive sense of the word, a great proportion of the writers we have alluded to were *Poets*: and, without going to those who composed in metre, and chiefly for purposes of delight, we will venture to assert, that there is in any one of the prose folios of Jeremy Taylor more fine fancy and original imagery—more brilliant conceptions and glowing expressions—more new figures, and new application of old figures—more, in short, of the body and the soul of poetry, than in all the odes and the epics that have since been produced in Europe. There are large portions of Barrow, and of Hooker and Bacon, of which we may say nearly as much: nor can any one have a tolerably adequate idea of the riches of our language and our native genius, who has not made himself acquainted with the prose writers, as well as the poets, of this memorable period....

The notoriety of Shakespeare may seem to make it superfluous to speak of the peculiarities of those old dramatists, of whom he will be admitted to be so worthy a representative. Nor shall we venture to say anything of the confusion of their plots, the disorders of their chronology, their contempt of the

unities, or their imperfect discrimination between the provinces of Tragedy and Comedy. Yet there are characteristics which the lovers of literature may not be displeased to find enumerated, and which may constitute no dishonourable distinction for the whole fraternity, independent of the splendid talents and incommunicable graces of their great chieftain.

Of the old English dramatists, then, including under this name (besides Shakespeare) Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Jonson, Ford, Shirley, Webster, Dekkar, Field, and Rowley, it may be said, in general, that they are more poetical, and more original in their diction, than the dramatists of any other age or country. Their scenes abound more in varied images, and gratuitous excursions of fancy. Their illustrations, and figures of speech, are more borrowed from rural life, and from the simple occupations or universal feelings of mankind. They are not confined to a certain range of dignified expressions, nor restricted to a particular assortment of imagery, beyond which it is not lawful to look for embellishments. Let any one compare the prodigious variety, and wide-ranging freedom of Shakespeare, with the narrow round of flames, tempests, treasons, victims, and tyrants, that scantily adorn the sententious pomp of the French drama, and he will not fail to recognize the vast superiority of the former, in the excitement of the imagination, and all the diversities of poetical delight. That very mixture of styles, of which the French critics have so fastidiously complained, forms, when not carried to any height of extravagance, one of the greatest charms of our ancient dramatists. It is equally sweet and natural for personages toiling on the barren heights of life, to be occasionally recalled to some vision of pastoral innocence and tranquillity, as for the victims or votaries of ambition to cast

a glance of envy and agony on the joys of humble content.

Those charming old writers, however, have a still more striking peculiarity in their conduct of the dialogue. On the modern stage, every scene is *visibly* studied and digested beforehand,—and every thing from beginning to end, whether it be description, or argument, or vituperation, is very obviously and ostentatiously set forth in the most advantageous light, and with all the decorations of the most elaborate rhetoric. Now, for mere rhetoric, and fine composition, this is very right; but, for an imitation of nature, it is not quite so well: and however we may admire the skill of the artist, we are not very likely to be moved with any very lively sympathy in the emotions of those very rhetorical interlocutors. When we come to any important part of the play, on the Continental or modern stage, we are sure to have a most complete, formal, and exhausting discussion of it, in long flourishing orations;—argument after argument propounded and answered with infinite ingenuity, and topic after topic brought forward in well-digested method, without any deviation that the most industrious and practised pleader would not approve of,—till nothing more remains to be said, and a new scene introduces us to a new set of gladiators, as expert and persevering as the former. It is exactly the same when a story is to be told,—a tyrant to be bullied,—or a princess to be wooed. On the old English stage, however, the proceedings were by no means so regular. There the discussions always appear to be casual, and the argument quite artless and disorderly. The persons of the drama, in short, are made to speak like men and women who meet without preparation, in real life. Their reasonings are perpetually broken by passion, or left imperfect

for want of skill. They constantly wander from the point in hand, in the most unbusinesslike manner in the world;—and after hitting upon a topic that would afford a judicious playwright room for a magnificent seesaw of pompous declamation, they have generally the awkwardness to let it slip, as if perfectly unconscious of its value; and uniformly leave the scene without exhausting the controversy, or stating half the plausible things for themselves that any ordinary advisers might have suggested—after a few weeks' reflection. As specimens of eloquent argumentation, we must admit the signal inferiority of our native favourites; but as true copies of nature—as vehicles of passion, and representations of character, we confess we are tempted to give them the preference. When a dramatist brings his chief characters on the stage, we readily admit that he must give them something to say,—and that this something must be interesting and characteristic;—but he should recollect also, that they are supposed to come there without having anticipated all they were to hear, or meditated on all they were to deliver; and that it cannot be characteristic, therefore, because it must be glaringly unnatural, that they should proceed regularly through every possible view of the subject, and exhaust, in set order, the whole magazine of reflections that can be brought to bear upon their situation.

It would not be fair, however, to leave this view of the matter, without observing that this unsteadiness and irregularity of dialogue, which gives such an air of nature to our older plays, and keeps the curiosity and attention so perpetually awake, is frequently carried to a most blameable excess; and that, independent of their passion for verbal quibbles, there *is* an inequality and a capricious uncertainty in the taste and judgement of these good old writers,

which excites at once our amazement and our compassion. If it be true that no other man has ever written so finely as Shakespeare has done in his happier passages, it is no less true that there is not a scribbler now alive who could possibly write worse than he has sometimes written,—who could, on occasion, devise more contemptible ideas, or misplace them so abominably, by the side of such incomparable excellence. That there were no critics, and no critical readers in those days, appears to us but an imperfect solution of the difficulty. He who could write so admirably must have been a critic to himself. . . .

There is only one other peculiarity which we shall notice in those ancient dramas; and that is, the singular, though very beautiful style, in which the greater part of them are composed,—a style which we think must be felt as peculiar by all who peruse them, though it is by no means easy to describe in what its peculiarity consists. It is not, for the most part, a lofty or sonorous style,—nor can it be said generally to be finical or affected,—or strained, quaint, or pedantic:—but it is, at the same time, a style full of turn and contrivance,—with some little degree of constraint and involution,—very often characterized by a studied briefness and simplicity of diction, yet relieved by a certain indirect and figurative cast of expression,—and almost always coloured with a modest tinge of ingenuity, and fashioned, rather too visibly, upon a particular model of elegance and purity. In scenes of powerful passion, this sort of artificial prettiness is commonly shaken off; and, in Shakespeare, it disappears under all his forms of animation; but it sticks closer to most of his contemporaries.

# SHAKESPEARE

## (August, 1817.)

*Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.* By William Hazlitt. 8vo, pp. 352. London, 1817 [1].

This is not a book of black-letter learning, or historical elucidation;—neither is it a metaphysical dissertation, full of wise perplexities and elaborate reconcilements. It is, in truth, rather an encomium on Shakespeare, than a commentary or critique on him—and is written, more to show extraordinary love, than extraordinary knowledge, of his productions. Nevertheless, it is a very pleasing book—and, we do not hesitate to say, a book of very considerable originality and genius. The author is not merely an admirer of our great dramatist, but an Idolater of him; and openly professes his idolatry. We have ourselves too great a leaning to the same superstition, to blame him very much for his error: and though we think, of course, that our own admiration is, on the whole, more discriminating and judicious, there are not many points on which, especially after reading

[1] It may be thought that enough had been said of our early dramatists, in the immediately preceding article; and it probably is so. But I could not resist the temptation of thus renewing, in my own name, that vow of allegiance, which I had so often taken anonymously, to the only true and lawful King of our English Poetry! and now venture, therefore, fondly to replace this slight and perishable wreath on his august and undecaying shrine: with no farther apology than that it presumes to direct attention but to one, and that, as I think, a comparatively neglected, aspect of his universal genius.

his eloquent exposition of them, we should be much inclined to disagree with him.

The book, as we have already intimated, is written less to tell the reader what Mr. H. *knows* about Shakespeare or his writings, than to explain to them what he *feels* about them—and *why* he feels so—and thinks that all who profess to love poetry should feel so likewise. What we chiefly look for in such a work, accordingly, is a fine sense of the beauties of the author, and an eloquent exposition of them; and all this, and more, we think, may be found in the volume before us. There is nothing niggardly in Mr. H.'s praises, and nothing affected in his raptures. He seems animated throughout with a full and hearty sympathy with the delight which his author should inspire, and pours himself gladly out in explanation of it, with a fluency and ardour, obviously much more akin to enthusiasm than affectation. He seems pretty generally, indeed, in a state of happy intoxication—and has borrowed from his great original, not indeed the force or brilliancy of his fancy, but something of its playfulness, and a large share of his apparent joyousness and self-indulgence in its exercise. It is evidently a great pleasure to him to be fully possessed with the beauties of his author, and to follow the impulse of his unrestrained eagerness to impress them upon his readers.

When we have said that his observations are generally right, we have said, in substance, that they are not generally original; for the beauties of Shakespeare are not of so dim or equivocal a nature as to be visible only to learned eyes—and undoubtedly his finest passages are those which please all classes of readers, and are admired for the same qualities by judges from every school of criticism. Even with regard to those passages, however, a skilful commentator will

find something worth hearing to tell. Many persons are very sensible of the effect of fine poetry on their feelings, who do not well know how to refer these feelings to their causes; and it is always a delightful thing to be made to see clearly the sources from which our delight has proceeded—and to trace back the mingled stream that has flowed upon our hearts, to the remoter fountains from which it has been gathered. And when this is done with warmth as well as precision, and embodied in an eloquent description of the beauty which is explained, it forms one of the most attractive, and not the least instructive, of literary exercises. In all works of merit, however, and especially in all works of original genius, there are a thousand retiring and less obtrusive graces, which escape hasty and superficial observers, and only give out their beauties to fond and patient contemplation;—a thousand slight and harmonizing touches, the merit and the effect of which are equally imperceptible to vulgar eyes; and a thousand indications of the continual presence of that poetical spirit, which can only be recognized by those who are in some measure under its influence, or have prepared themselves to receive it, by worshipping meekly at the shrines which it inhabits.

In the exposition of these, there is room enough for originality,—and more room than Mr. H. has yet filled. In many points, however, he has acquitted himself excellently;—partly in the development of the principal characters with which Shakespeare has peopled the fancies of all English readers—but principally, we think, in the delicate sensibility with which he has traced, and the natural eloquence with which he has pointed out that fond familiarity with beautiful forms and images—that eternal recurrence to what is sweet or majestic in the simple aspects of nature—that in-

destructible love of flowers and odours, and dews and clear waters, and soft airs and sounds, and bright skies, and woodland solitudes, and moonlight bowers, which are the Material elements of Poetry—and that fine sense of their undefinable relation to mental emotion, which is its essence and vivifying Soul—and which, in the midst of Shakespeare's most busy and atrocious scenes, falls like gleams of sunshine on rocks and ruins—contrasting with all that is rugged and repulsive, and reminding us of the existence of purer and brighter elements !—which HE ALONE has poured out from the richness of his own mind, without effort or restraint ; and contrived to intermingle with the play of all the passions, and the vulgar course of this world's affairs, without deserting for an instant the proper business of the scene, or appearing to pause or digress, from love of ornament or need of repose !—HE ALONE who, when the object requires it, is always keen and worldly and practical—and who yet, without changing his hand, or stopping his course, scatters around him, as he goes, all sounds and shapes of sweetness—and conjures up landscapes of immortal fragrance and freshness, and peoples them with Spirits of glorious aspect and attractive grace—and is a thousand times more full of fancy and imagery, and splendour, than those who, in pursuit of such enchantments, have shrunk back from the delineation of character or passion, and declined the discussion of human duties and cares. More full of wisdom and ridicule and sagacity, than all the moralists and satirists that ever existed—he is more wild, airy, and inventive, and more pathetic and fantastic, than all the poets of all regions and ages of the world :—and has all those elements so happily mixed up in him, and bears his high faculties so temperately, that the most severe reader cannot com-

plain of him for want of strength or of reason—nor the most sensitive for defect of ornament or ingenuity. Every thing in him is in unmeasured abundance, and unequalled perfection—but everything so balanced and kept in subordination, as not to jostle or disturb or take the place of another. The most exquisite poetical conceptions, images, and descriptions, are given with such brevity, and introduced with such skill, as merely to adorn, without loading the sense they accompany. Although his sails are purple and perfumed, and his prow of beaten gold, they waft him on his voyage, not less, but more rapidly and directly than if they had been composed of baser materials. All his excellences, like those of Nature herself, are thrown out together; and instead of interfering with, support and recommend each other. His flowers are not tied up in garlands, nor his fruits crushed into baskets—but spring living from the soil, in all the dew and freshness of youth; while the graceful foliage in which they lurk, and the ample branches, the rough and vigorous stem, and the wide-spreading roots on which they depend, are present along with them, and share, in their places, the equal care of their Creator.

What other poet has put all the charm of a Moonlight landscape into a single line?—and that by an image so true to nature, and so simple, as to seem obvious to the most common observation?—

See how the Moonlight SLEEPS on yonder bank!

Who else has expressed, in three lines, all that is picturesque and lovely in a Summer's Dawn?—first setting before our eyes, with magical precision, the visible appearances of the infant light, and then by one graceful and glorious image, pouring on our souls

all the freshness, cheerfulness, and sublimity of returning morning ?—

> ——— See, love ! what envious streaks
> Do lace the severing clouds in yonder East !
> Night's candles [1] are burnt out,—and jocund Day
> Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops !

Where shall we find sweet sounds and odours so luxuriously blended and illustrated, as in these few words of sweetness and melody, where the author says of soft music—

> O it came o'er my ear like the sweet South
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour !

This is still finer, we think, than the noble speech on Music in the *Merchant of Venice*, and only to be compared with the enchantments of Prospero's island ; where all the effects of sweet sounds are expressed in miraculous numbers, and traced in their operation on all the gradations of being, from the delicate Ariel to the brutish Caliban, who, savage as he is, is still touched with those super-

[1] If the advocates for the grand style object to this expression, we shall not stop to defend it : but, to us, it seems equally beautiful, as it is obvious and natural, to a person coming out of a lighted chamber into the pale dawn. The word candle, we admit, is rather homely in modern language, while lamp is sufficiently dignified for poetry. The moon hangs her silver lamp on high, in every schoolboy's copy of verses ; and she could not be called the candle of heaven without manifest absurdity. Such are the caprices of usage. Yet we like the passage before us much better as it is, than if the candles were changed into lamps. If we should read, 'The lamps of heaven are quenched,' or ' wax dim ', it appears to us that the whole charm of the expression would be lost : as our fancies would no longer be recalled to the privacy of that dim-lighted chamber which the lovers were so reluctantly leaving.

natural harmonies; and thus exhorts his less poetical associates—

Be not afraid, the isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices,
That if I then had waked after long sleep,
Would make me sleep again.

Observe, too, that this and the other poetical speeches of this incarnate demon, are not mere ornaments of the poet's fancy, but explain his character and describe his situation more briefly and effectually than any other words could have done. In this play, indeed, and in the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, all Eden is unlocked before us, and the whole treasury of natural and supernatural beauty poured out profusely, to the delight of all our faculties. We dare not trust ourselves with quotations; but we refer to those plays generally—to the forest scenes in *As You Like It*—the rustic parts of the *Winter's Tale*—several entire scenes in *Cymbeline*, and in *Romeo and Juliet*—and many passages in all the other plays—as illustrating this love of nature and natural beauty of which we have been speaking—the power it had over the poet, and the power it imparted to him. Who else would have thought, on the very threshold of treason and midnight murder, of bringing in so sweet and rural an image as this, at the portal of that blood-stained castle of Macbeth?

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
By his loved masonry that heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here. No jutting frieze,
Buttress, nor coigne of vantage, but this bird
Has made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle.

Nor is this brought in for the sake of an elaborate contrast between the peaceful innocence of this exterior, and the guilt and horrors that are to be enacted within. There is no hint of any such suggestion—but it is set down from the pure love of nature and reality—because the kindled mind of the poet brought the whole scene before his eyes, and he painted all that he saw in his vision. The same taste predominates in that emphatic exhortation to evil, where Lady Macbeth says,

——— Look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under it.

And in that proud boast of the bloody Richard—

But I was *born* so high :
Our aery buildeth in the cedar's top,
And dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun !

The same splendour of natural imagery, brought simply and directly to bear upon stern and repulsive passions, is to be found in the cynic rebukes of Apemantus to Timon.

Will these moist trees
That have out-liv'd the eagle, page thy heels,
And skip when thou point'st out ? will the cold brook,
Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste
To cure thine o'er-night's surfeit ?

No one but Shakespeare would have thought of putting this noble picture into the taunting address of a snappish misanthrope—any more than the following into the mouth of a mercenary murderer.

Their lips were four red roses on a stalk,
And *in their summer beauty* kiss'd each other !

Or this delicious description of concealed love, into that of a regretful and moralizing parent.

> But he, his own affections' Counsellor,
> Is to himself so secret and so close,
> As is the bud bit with an envious worm
> Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,
> Or dedicate his beauty to the sun.

And yet all these are so far from being unnatural, that they are no sooner put where they are, than we feel at once their beauty and their effect; and acknowledge our obligations to that exuberant genius which alone could thus throw out graces and attractions where there seemed to be neither room nor call for them. In the same spirit of prodigality he puts this rapturous and passionate exaltation of the beauty of Imogen, into the mouth of one who is not even a lover.

> — It is her breathing that
> Perfumes the chamber thus! the flame o' th' taper
> Bows towards her! and would under-peep her lids
> To see th' enclosed lights, now canopied
> Under the windows, white and azure, laced
> With blue of Heaven's own tinct!—on her left breast
> A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
> I' the bottom of a cowslip!

But we must break at once away from these manifold enchantments—and recollect that our business is with Mr. Hazlitt.

# A RETROSPECT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

(SEPTEMBER, 1816.)

*The Works of* JONATHAN SWIFT, D.D., *Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin. Containing Additional Letters, Tracts, and Poems not hitherto published. With Notes, and a Life of the Author, by* WALTER SCOTT, Esq. 19 vols. 8vo. Edinburgh, 1815.

BY far the most considerable change which has taken place in the world of letters, in our days, is that by which the wits of Queen Anne's time have been gradually brought down from the supremacy which they had enjoyed, without competition, for the best part of a century. When we were at our studies, some twenty-five years ago, we can perfectly remember that every young man was set to read Pope, Swift, and Addison, as regularly as Virgil, Cicero, and Horace. All who had any tincture of letters were familiar with their writings and their history; allusions to them abounded in all popular discourses and all ambitious conversation; and they and their contemporaries were universally acknowledged as our great models of excellence, and placed without challenge at the head of our national literature. New books, even when allowed to have merit, were never thought of as fit to be placed in the same class, but were generally read and forgotten, and passed away like the transitory meteors of a lower sky; while *they* remained in their brightness, and were supposed to shine with a fixed and unalterable glory.

All this, however, we take it, is now pretty well altered; and in so far as persons of our antiquity

can judge of the training and habits of the rising generation, those celebrated writers no longer form the manual of our studious youth, or enter necessarily into the institution of a liberal education. Their names, indeed, are still familiar to our ears ; but their writings no longer solicit our habitual notice, and their subjects begin already to fade from our recollection. Their high privileges and proud distinctions, at any rate, have evidently passed into other hands. It is no longer to them that the ambitious look up with envy, or the humble with admiration ; nor is it in their pages that the pretenders to wit and eloquence now search for allusions that are sure to captivate, and illustrations that cannot be mistaken. In this decay of their reputation they have few advocates, and no imitators : and from a comparison of many observations, it seems to be clearly ascertained, that they are declined considerably from ' the high meridian of their glory ', and may fairly be apprehended to be ' hastening to their setting '. Neither is it time alone that has wrought this obscuration ; for the fame of Shakespeare still shines in undecaying brightness ; and that of Bacon has been steadily advancing and gathering new honours during the whole period which has witnessed the rise and decline of his less vigorous successors.

There are but two possible solutions for phenomena of this sort. Our taste has either degenerated—or its old models have been fairly surpassed ; and we have ceased to admire the writers of the last century, only because they are too good for us—or because they are not good enough. Now, we confess we are no believers in the absolute and permanent corruption of national taste ; on the contrary, we think that it is, of all faculties, that which is most sure to advance and improve with time and experience ; and that,

with the exception of those great physical or political disasters which have given a check to civilization itself, there has always been a sensible progress in this particular; and that the general taste of every successive generation is better than that of its predecessors. There are little capricious fluctuations, no doubt, and fits of foolish admiration or fastidiousness, which cannot be so easily accounted for: but the great movements are all progressive: and though the progress consists at one time in withholding toleration from gross faults, and at another in giving their high prerogative to great beauties, this alternation has no tendency to obstruct the general advance; but, on the contrary, is the best and the safest course in which it can be conducted.

We are of opinion, then, that the writers who adorned the beginning of the last century have been eclipsed by those of our own time; and that they have no chance of ever regaining the supremacy in which they have thus been supplanted. There is not, however, in our judgement, anything very stupendous in this triumph of our contemporaries; and the greater wonder with us is, that it was so long delayed, and left for them to achieve. For the truth is that the writers of the former age had not a great deal more than their judgement and industry to stand on; and were always much more remarkable for the fewness of their faults than the greatness of their beauties. Their laurels were won much more by good conduct and discipline, than by enterprising boldness or native force; nor can it be regarded as any very great merit in those who had so little of the inspiration of genius, to have steered clear of the dangers to which that inspiration is liable. Speaking generally of that generation of authors, it may be said that, as poets, they had no force or greatness of fancy—no pathos, and

no enthusiasm;—and, as philosophers, no comprehensiveness, depth, or originality. They are sagacious, no doubt, neat, clear, and reasonable; but for the most part cold, timid, and superficial. They never meddle with the great scenes of nature, or the great passions of man; but content themselves with just and sarcastic representations of city life, and of the paltry passions and meaner vices that are bred in that lower element. Their chief care is to avoid being ridiculous in the eyes of the witty, and above all to eschew the ridicule of excessive sensibility or enthusiasm—to be at once witty and rational themselves, with as good a grace as possible; but to give their countenance to no wisdom, no fancy, and no morality, which passes the standards current in good company. —Their inspiration, accordingly, is little more than a sprightly sort of good sense; and they have scarcely any invention but what is subservient to the purposes of derision and satire. Little gleams of pleasantry, and sparkles of wit, glitter through their compositions; but no glow of feeling—no blaze of imagination—no flashes of genius, ever irradiate their substance. They never pass beyond 'the visible diurnal sphere', or deal in anything that can either lift us above our vulgar nature, or ennoble its reality. With these accomplishments, they may pass well enough for sensible and polite writers—but scarcely for men of genius; and it is certainly far more surprising that persons of this description should have maintained themselves, for near a century, at the head of the literature of a country that had previously produced a Shakespeare, a Spenser, a Bacon, and a Taylor, than that, towards the end of that long period, doubts should have arisen as to the legitimacy of the title by which they laid claim to that high station. Both parts of the phenomenon, however, we dare say, had

causes which better expounders might explain to the satisfaction of all the world. We see them but imperfectly, and have room only for an imperfect sketch of what we see.

Our first literature consisted of saintly legends, and romances of chivalry,—though Chaucer gave it a more national and popular character, by his original descriptions of external nature, and the familiarity and gaiety of his social humour. In the time of Elizabeth, it received a copious infusion of classical images and ideas: but it was still intrinsically romantic—serious —and even somewhat lofty and enthusiastic. Authors were then so few in number, that they were looked upon with a sort of veneration, and considered as a kind of inspired persons;—at least they were not yet so numerous as to be obliged to abuse each other, in order to obtain a share of distinction for themselves; —and they neither affected a tone of derision in their writings, nor wrote in fear of derision from others. They were filled with their subjects, and dealt with them fearlessly in their own way; and the stamp of originality, force, and freedom, is consequently upon almost all their productions. In the reign of James I, our literature, with some few exceptions, touching rather the form than the substance of its merits, appears to us to have reached the greatest perfection to which it has yet attained; though it would probably have advanced still farther in the succeeding reign, had not the great national dissensions which then arose, turned the talent and energy of the people into other channels—first, to the assertion of their civil rights, and afterwards to the discussion of their religious interests. The graces of literature suffered of course in those fierce contentions; and a deeper shade of austerity was thrown upon the intellectual character of the nation. Her genius, however, though

less captivating and adorned than in the happier days which preceded, was still active, fruitful, and commanding; and the period of the civil wars, besides the mighty minds that guided the public councils, and were absorbed in public cares, produced the giant powers of Taylor, and Hobbes, and Barrow—the muse of Milton—the learning of Coke—and the ingenuity of Cowley.

The Restoration introduced a French court—under circumstances more favourable for the effectual exercise of court influence than ever before existed in England: but this of itself would not have been sufficient to account for the sudden change in our literature which ensued. It was seconded by causes of far more general operation. The Restoration was undoubtedly a popular act; and, indefensible as the conduct of the army and the civil leaders was on that occasion, there can be no question that the severities of Cromwell, and the extravagances of the sectaries, had made republican professions hateful, and religious ardour ridiculous, in the eyes of a great proportion of the people. All the eminent writers of the preceding period, however, had inclined to the party that was now overthrown; and their writings had not merely been accommodated to the character of the government under which they were produced, but were deeply imbued with its obnoxious principles, which were those of their respective authors. When the restraints of authority were taken off, therefore, and it became profitable, as well as popular, to discredit the fallen party, it was natural that the leading authors should affect a style of levity and derision, as most opposite to that of their opponents, and best calculated for the purposes they had in view. The nation, too, was now for the first time essentially divided in point of character and principle, and a much greater

proportion were capable both of writing in support of their own notions, and of being influenced by what was written. Add to all this, that there were real and serious defects in the style and manner of the former generation; and that the grace, and brevity, and vivacity of that gayer manner which was now introduced from France, were not only good and captivating in themselves, but had then all the charms of novelty and of contrast; and it will not be difficult to understand how it came to supplant that which had been established of old in the country,—and that so suddenly, that the same generation, among whom Milton had been formed to the severe sanctity of wisdom and the noble independence of genius, lavished its loudest applauses on the obscenity and servility of such writers as Rochester and Wycherley.

This change, however, like all sudden changes, was too fierce and violent to be long maintained at the same pitch; and when the wits and profligates of King Charles had sufficiently insulted the seriousness and virtue of their predecessors, there would probably have been a revulsion towards the accustomed taste of the nation, had not the party of the innovators been reinforced by champions of more temperance and judgement. The result seemed at one time suspended on the will of Dryden—in whose individual person the genius of the English and of the French school of literature may be said to have maintained a protracted struggle. But the evil principle prevailed! Carried by the original bent of his genius, and his familiarity with our older models, to the cultivation of our native style, to which he might have imparted more steadiness and correctness—for in force and in sweetness it was already matchless—he was unluckily seduced by the attractions of fashion, and the dazzling of the dear wit and gay rhetoric in which it delighted, to

lend his powerful aid to the new corruptions and refinements; and in fact, to prostitute his great gifts to the purposes of party rage or licentious ribaldry.

The sobriety of the succeeding reigns allayed this fever of profanity; but no genius arose sufficiently powerful to break the spell that still withheld us from the use of our own peculiar gifts and faculties. On the contrary, it was the unfortunate ambition of the next generation of authors, to improve and perfect the new style, rather than to return to the old one;—and it cannot be denied that they did improve it. They corrected its gross indecency—increased its precision and correctness—made its pleasantry and sarcasm more polished and elegant—and spread through the whole of its irony, its narration, and its reflection, a tone of clear and condensed good sense, which recommended itself to all who had, and all who had not any relish for higher beauties.

This is the praise of Queen Anne's wits—and to this praise they are justly entitled. This was left for them to do, and they did it well. They were invited to it by the circumstances of their situation, and do not seem to have been possessed of any such bold or vigorous spirit, as either to neglect or to outgo the invitation. Coming into life immediately after the consummation of a bloodless revolution, effected much more by the cool sense than the angry passions of the nation, they seem to have felt that they were born in an age of reason, rather than of feeling or fancy; and that men's minds, though considerably divided and unsettled upon many points, were in a much better temper to relish judicious argument and cutting satire, than the glow of enthusiastic passion, or the richness of a luxuriant imagination. To those accordingly they made no pretensions; but, writing with infinite good sense, and great grace and vivacity, and, above all,

writing for the first time in a tone that was peculiar to the upper ranks of society, and upon subjects that were almost exclusively interesting to them, they naturally figured, at least while the manner was new, as the most accomplished, fashionable, and perfect writers which the world had ever seen; and made the wild, luxuriant, and humble sweetness of our earlier authors appear rude and untutored in the comparison. Men grew ashamed of admiring, and afraid of imitating writers of so little skill and smartness; and the opinion became general, not only that their faults were intolerable, but that even their beauties were puerile and barbarous, and unworthy the serious regard of a polite and distinguishing age.

These, and similar considerations, will go far to account for the celebrity which those authors acquired in their day; but it is not quite so easy to explain how they should have so long retained their ascendant. One cause undoubtedly was the real excellence of their productions, in the style which they had adopted. It was hopeless to think of surpassing them in that style; and, recommended as it was, by the felicity of their execution, it required some courage to depart from it, and to recur to another, which seemed to have been so lately abandoned for its sake. The age which succeeded, too, was not the age of courage or adventure. There never was, on the whole, a quieter time than the reigns of the first two Georges, and the greater part of that which ensued. There were two little provincial rebellions indeed, and a fair proportion of foreign war; but there was nothing to stir the minds of the people at large, to rouse their passions, or excite their imaginations—nothing like the agitations of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, or of the civil wars in the seventeenth. They went on, accordingly, minding their old business, and reading

their old books, with great patience and stupidity: and certainly there never was so remarkable a dearth of original talent—so long an *interregnum* of native genius—as during about sixty years in the middle of the last century. The dramatic art was dead fifty years before—and poetry seemed verging to a similar extinction. The few sparks that appeared, too, showed that the old fire was burnt out, and that the altar must hereafter be heaped with fuel of another quality. Gray, with the talents rather of a critic than a poet—with learning, fastidiousness, and scrupulous delicacy of taste, instead of fire, tenderness, or invention—began and ended a small school, which we could scarcely have wished to become permanent, admirable in many respects as some of its productions are—being far too elaborate and artificial, either for grace or for fluency, and fitter to excite the admiration of scholars than the delight of ordinary men. However, he had the merit of not being in any degree French, and of restoring to our poetry the dignity of seriousness, and the tone at least of force and energy. The Wartons, both as critics and as poets, were of considerable service in discrediting the high pretensions of the former race, and in bringing back to public notice the great stores and treasures of poetry which lay hid in the records of our older literature. Akenside attempted a sort of classical and philosophical rapture, which no elegance of language could easily have rendered popular, but which had merits of no vulgar order for those who could study it. Goldsmith wrote with perfect elegance and beauty, in a style of mellow tenderness and elaborate simplicity. He had the harmony of Pope without his quaintness, and his selectness of diction without his coldness and eternal vivacity. And, last of all, came Cowper, with a style of complete originality,—and, for the first time, made

it apparent to readers of all descriptions, that Pope and Addison were no longer to be the models of English poetry.

In philosophy and prose writing in general, the case was nearly parallel. The name of Hume is by far the most considerable which occurs in the period to which we have alluded. But, though his thinking was English, his style is entirely French; and being naturally of a cold fancy, there is nothing of that eloquence or richness about him, which characterizes the writings of Taylor, and Hooker, and Bacon—and continues, with less weight of matter, to please in those of Cowley and Clarendon. Warburton had great powers; and wrote with more force and freedom than the wits to whom he succeeded—but his faculties were perverted by a paltry love of paradox, and rendered useless to mankind by an unlucky choice of subjects, and the arrogance and dogmatism of his temper. Adam Smith was nearly the first who made deeper reasonings and more exact knowledge popular among us; and Junius and Johnson the first who again familiarized us with more glowing and sonorous diction—and made us feel the tameness and poorness of the serious style of Addison and Swift.

This brings us down almost to the present times—in which the revolution in our literature has been accelerated and confirmed by the concurrence of many causes. The agitations of the French Revolution, and the discussions as well as the hopes and terrors to which it gave occasion—the genius of Edmund Burke, and some others of his land of genius—the impression of the new literature of Germany, evidently the original of our lake-school of poetry, and of many innovations in our drama—the rise or revival of a more evangelical spirit, in the body of the people—and the vast extension of our political and commercial rela-

tions, which have not only familiarized all ranks of people with distant countries, and great undertakings, but have brought knowledge and enterprise home, not merely to the imagination, but to the actual experience of almost every individual—all these, and several other circumstances, have so far improved or excited the character of our nation, as to have created an effectual demand for more profound speculation, and more serious emotion than was dealt in by the writers of the former century, and which, if it has not yet produced a corresponding supply in all branches, has at least had the effect of decrying the commodities that were previously in vogue, as unsuited to the altered condition of the times.

[Jeffrey wrote three general accounts of the course of English literature,—in the articles on Weber's edition of Ford (August, 1811), Scott's edition of Swift (September, 1816), and Campbell's *Specimens of the British Poets* (March, 1819). They have much in common. The account here given expresses with greatest vigour his views on the eighteenth century.

These views are restated in one of his last pieces of poetical criticism, the article on Atherstone's *Fall of Nineveh* (September, 1828):—'The present age, we think, has an hundred times more poetry, and more true taste for poetry, than that which immediately preceded it,—and of which, reckoning its duration from the extinction of the last of Queen Anne's wits down to about thirty odd years ago, we take leave to say that it was, beyond all dispute, the most unpoetical age in the annals of this or any other considerable nation. Nothing, indeed, can be conceived more dreary and sterile than the aspect of our national poetry from the time of Pope and Thomson, down to that of Burns and Cowper,' &c.]

# ROBERT BURNS

## (January, 1809.)

*Reliques of* Robert Burns, *consisting chiefly of Original Letters, Poems, and Critical Observations on Scottish Songs. Collected and published by* R. H. Cromek. 8vo, pp. 450. London, 1808.

. . . There are peculiarities in his works which remind us of the lowness of his origin, and faults for which the defects of his education afford an obvious cause if not a legitimate apology. In forming a correct estimate of these works, it is necessary to take into account those peculiarities.

The first is the undisciplined harshness and acrimony of his invective. The great boast of polished life is the delicacy, and even the generosity of its hostility—that quality which is still the characteristic, as it furnishes the denomination, of a gentleman—that principle which forbids us to attack the defenceless, to strike the fallen, or to mangle the slain—and enjoins us, in forging the shafts of satire, to increase the polish exactly as we add to their keenness or their weight. For this, as well as for other things, we are indebted to chivalry; and of this Burns had none. His ingenious and amiable biographer has spoken repeatedly in praise of his talents for satire—we think, with a most unhappy partiality. His epigrams and lampoons appear to us, one and all, unworthy of him;—offensive from their extreme coarseness and violence—and contemptible from their want of wit or brilliancy. They seem to have been written, not out of playful malice or virtuous indignation, but out of fierce and ungovernable anger. His whole raillery

consists in railing; and his satirical vein displays itself chiefly in calling names and in swearing. We say this mainly with a reference to his personalities. In many of his more general representations of life and manners, there is no doubt much that may be called satirical, mixed up with admirable humour, and description of inimitable vivacity.

There is a similar want of polish, or at least of respectfulness, in the general tone of his gallantry. He has written with more passion, perhaps, and more variety of natural feeling, on the subject of love, than any other poet whatever—but with a fervour that is sometimes indelicate, and seldom accommodated to the timidity and 'sweet austere composure' of women of refinement. He has expressed admirably the feelings of an enamoured peasant, who, however refined or eloquent he may be, always approaches his mistress on a footing of equality; but has never caught that tone of chivalrous gallantry which uniformly abases itself in the presence of the object of its devotion. Accordingly, instead of suing for a smile, or melting in a tear, his muse deals in nothing but locked embraces and midnight rencontres; and, even in his complimentary effusions to ladies of the highest rank, is for straining them to the bosom of her impetuous votary. It is easy, accordingly, to see from his correspondence, that many of his female patronesses shrunk from the vehement familiarity of his admiration; and there are even some traits in the volumes before us, from which we can gather that he resented the shyness and estrangement to which those feelings gave rise, with at least as little chivalry as he had shown in producing them.

But the leading vice in Burns's character, and the cardinal deformity, indeed, of all his productions, was his contempt, or affectation of contempt, for prudence,

decency, and regularity; and his admiration of thoughtlessness, oddity, and vehement sensibility;—his belief, in short, in *the dispensing power* of genius and social feeling, in all matters of morality and common sense. This is the very slang of the worst German plays, and the lowest of our town-made novels; nor can anything be more lamentable, than that it should have found a patron in such a man as Burns, and communicated to many of his productions a character of immorality, at once contemptible and hateful. It is but too true, that men of the highest genius have frequently been hurried by their passions into a violation of prudence and duty; and there is something generous, at least, in the apology which their admirers may make for them, on the score of their keener feelings and habitual want of reflection. But this apology, which is quite unsatisfactory in the mouth of another, becomes an insult and an absurdity whenever it proceeds from their own. A man may say of his friend, that he is a noble-hearted fellow—too generous to be just, and with too much spirit to be always prudent and regular. But he cannot be allowed to say even this of himself; and still less to represent himself as a hairbrained sentimental soul, constantly carried away by fine fancies and visions of love and philanthropy, and born to confound and despise the cold-blooded sons of prudence and sobriety. This apology, indeed, evidently destroys itself: for it shows that conduct to be the result of deliberate system, which it affects at the same time to justify as the fruit of mere thoughtlessness and casual impulse. Such protestations, therefore, will always be treated, as they deserve, not only with contempt, but with incredulity; and their magnanimous authors set down as determined profligates, who seek to disguise their selfishness under a name somewhat less revolting.

That profligacy is almost always selfishness, and that the excuse of impetuous feeling can hardly ever be justly pleaded for those who neglect the ordinary duties of life, must be apparent, we think, even to the least reflecting of those sons of fancy and song. It requires no habit of deep thinking, nor anything more, indeed, than the information of an honest heart, to perceive that it is cruel and base to spend, in vain superfluities, that money which belongs of right to the pale industrious tradesman and his famishing infants; or that it is a vile prostitution of language to talk of that man's generosity or goodness of heart, who sits raving about friendship and philanthropy in a tavern, while his wife's heart is breaking at her cheerless fireside, and his children pining in solitary poverty.

This pitiful cant of careless feeling and eccentric genius, accordingly, has never found much favour in the eyes of English sense and morality. The most signal effect which it ever produced, was on the muddy brains of some German youth, who are said to have left college in a body to rob on the highway! because Schiller had represented the captain of a gang as so very noble a creature.—But in this country, we believe, a predilection for that honourable profession must have preceded this admiration of the character. The style we have been speaking of, accordingly, is now the heroics only of the hulks and the house of correction; and has no chance, we suppose, of being greatly admired, except in the farewell speech of a young gentleman preparing for Botany Bay.

It is humiliating to think how deeply Burns has fallen into this debasing error. He is perpetually making a parade of his thoughtlessness, inflammability, and imprudence, and talking with much complacency and exultation of the offence he has occasioned

to the sober and correct part of mankind. This odious slang infects almost all his prose, and a very great proportion of his poetry; and is, we are persuaded, the chief, if not the only source of the disgust with which, in spite of his genius, we know that he is regarded by many very competent and liberal judges. His apology, too, we are willing to believe, is to be found in the original lowness of his situation, and the slightness of his acquaintance with the world. With his talents and power of observation, he could not have seen *much* of the beings who echoed this raving, without feeling for them that distrust and contempt which would have made him blush to think he had ever stretched over them the protecting shield of his genius.

Akin to this most lamentable trait of vulgarity, and indeed in some measure arising out of it, is that perpetual boast of his own independence, which is obtruded upon the readers of Burns in almost every page of his writings. The sentiment itself is noble, and it is often finely expressed;—but a gentleman would only have expressed it when he was insulted or provoked; and would never have made it a spontaneous theme to those friends in whose estimation he felt that his honour stood clear. It is mixed up, too, in Burns with too fierce a tone of defiance; and indicates rather the pride of a sturdy peasant, than the calm and natural elevation of a generous mind.

The last of the symptoms of rusticity which we think it necessary to notice in the works of this extraordinary man, is that frequent mistake of mere exaggeration and violence, for force and sublimity, which has defaced so much of his prose composition, and given an air of heaviness and labour to a good deal of his serious poetry. The truth is, that his *forte* was in humour and in pathos—or rather in

tenderness of feeling; and that he has very seldom succeeded, either where mere wit and sprightliness, or where great energy and weight of sentiment were requisite. He had evidently a very false and crude notion of what constituted *strength* of writing; and instead of that simple and brief directness which stamps the character of vigour upon every syllable, has generally had recourse to a mere accumulation of hyperbolical expressions, which encumber the diction instead of exalting it, and show the determination to be impressive, without the power of executing it. This error also we are inclined to ascribe entirely to the defects of his education. The value of simplicity in the expression of passion, is a lesson, we believe, of nature and of genius;—but its importance in mere grave and impressive writing, is one of the latest discoveries of rhetorical experience.

With the allowances and exceptions we have now stated, we think Burns entitled to the rank of a great and original genius. He has in all his compositions great force of conception; and great spirit and animation in its expression. He has taken a large range through the region of Fancy, and naturalized himself in almost all her climates. He has great humour—great powers of description—great pathos—and great discrimination of character. Almost everything that he says has spirit and originality; and everything that he says well is characterized by a charming facility, which gives a grace even to occasional rudeness, and communicates to the reader a delightful sympathy with the spontaneous soaring and conscious inspiration of the poet.

Considering the reception which these works have met with from the public, and the long period during which the greater part of them have been in their possession, it may appear superfluous to say anything

as to their characteristic or peculiar merit. Though the ultimate judgement of the public, however, be always sound, or at least decisive as to its general result, it is not always very apparent upon what grounds it has proceeded; nor in consequence of what, or in spite of what, it has been obtained. In Burns's works there is much to censure, as well as much to praise; and as time has not yet separated his ore from its dross, it may be worth while to state, in a very general way, what we presume to anticipate as the result of this separation. Without pretending to enter at all into the comparative merit of particular passages, we may venture to lay it down as our opinion—that his poetry is far superior to his prose; that his Scottish compositions are greatly to be preferred to his English ones; and that his Songs will probably outlive all his other productions. . . .

We shall conclude with two general remarks—the one national, the other critical. The first is, that it is impossible to read the productions of Burns, along with his history, without forming a higher idea of the intelligence, taste, and accomplishments of our peasantry, than most of those in the higher ranks are disposed to entertain. Without meaning to deny that he himself was endowed with rare and extraordinary gifts of genius and fancy, it is evident, from the whole details of his history, as well as from the letters of his brother, and the testimony of Mr. Murdoch and others to the character of his father, that the whole family, and many of their associates, who never emerged from the native obscurity of their condition, possessed talents, and taste, and intelligence, which are little suspected to lurk in those humble retreats. His epistles to brother poets, in the rank of small farmers and shopkeepers in the adjoining villages,—the existence of a book-society and debating-club

among persons of that description, and many other incidental traits in his sketches of his youthful companions,—all contribute to show that not only good sense, and enlightened morality, but literature, and talents for speculation, are far more generally diffused in society than is commonly imagined ; and that the delights and the benefits of those generous and humanizing pursuits, are by no means confined to those whom leisure and affluence have courted to their enjoyment. That much of this is peculiar to Scotland, and may be properly referred to our excellent institutions for parochial education, and to the natural sobriety and prudence of our nation, may certainly be allowed : but we have no doubt that there is a good deal of the same principle in England, and that the actual intelligence of the lower orders will be found, there also, very far to exceed the ordinary estimates of their superiors. It is pleasing to know that the sources of rational enjoyment are so widely disseminated ; and in a free country, it is comfortable to think that so great a proportion of the people is able to appreciate the advantages of its condition, and fit to be relied on in all emergencies where steadiness and intelligence may be required.

Our other remark is of a more limited application ; and is addressed chiefly to the followers and patrons of that new school of poetry, against which we have thought it our duty to neglect no opportunity of testifying. Those gentlemen are outrageous for simplicity ; and we beg leave to recommend to them the simplicity of Burns. He has copied the spoken language of passion and affection, with infinitely more fidelity than they have ever done, on all occasions which properly admitted of such adaptation : but he has not rejected the helps of elevated language and habitual associations ; nor debased his composi-

tion by an affectation of babyish interjections, and all the puling expletives of an old nursery-maid's vocabulary. They may look long enough among his nervous and manly lines, before they find any 'Good lacks!' —'Dear hearts!'—or 'As a body may says', in them; or any stuff about dancing daffodils and sister Emmelines. Let them think, with what infinite contempt the powerful mind of Burns would have perused the story of Alice Fell and her duffle cloak,—of Andrew Jones and the half-crown,—or of Little Dan without breeches, and his thievish grandfather. Let them contrast their own fantastical personages of hysterical schoolmasters and sententious leech-gatherers, with the authentic rustics of Burns's 'Cotter's Saturday Night', and his inimitable songs; and reflect on the different reception which those personifications have met with from the public. Though they will not be reclaimed from their puny affectations by the example of their learned predecessors, they may, perhaps, submit to be admonished by a self-taught and illiterate poet, who drew from Nature far more directly than they can do, and produced something so much liker the admired copies of the masters whom they have abjured.

[Jeffrey's criticism of Burns, the most coldly discriminating that has been written by a fellow-countryman, roused considerable resentment in Scotland. Lockhart echoed the popular opinion when, in the person of Peter Morris, he described it as 'the longest, and most deliberate, and most elaborate attack that ever assailed the character of Burns' (*Peter's Letters*, 1819, i. 113). Jeffrey's later views on Burns are to be found in a letter to William Empson, November 11, 1837 (*Life*, by Cockburn, 1852, ii. 292). One of his last acts as editor of the *Edinburgh* was to accept the essay on Burns by Carlyle.]

# GEORGE CRABBE

(April, 1808.)

*Poems.* By the Reverend George Crabbe. 8vo, pp. 260. London, 1807 [1].

We receive the proofs of Mr. Crabbe's poetical existence, which are contained in this volume, with the same sort of feeling that would be excited by tidings of an ancient friend, whom we no longer expected to hear of in this world. We rejoice in his resurrection, both for his sake and for our own: but we feel also a certain movement of self-condemnation, for having been remiss in our inquiries after him, and somewhat too negligent of the honours which ought, at any rate, to have been paid to his memory.

It is now, we are afraid, upwards of twenty years since we were first struck with the vigour, originality,

[1] I have given a larger space to Crabbe in this republication than to any of his contemporary poets; not merely because I think more highly of him than most of them, but also because I fancy that he has had less justice done him. The nature of his subjects was not such as to attract either imitators or admirers, from among the ambitious or fanciful lovers of poetry; or, consequently, to set him at the head of a School, or let him surround himself with the zealots of a Sect: and it must also be admitted, that his claims to distinction depend fully as much on his great powers of observation, his skill in touching the deeper sympathies of our nature, and his power of inculcating, by their means, the most impressive lessons of humanity, as on any fine play of fancy, or grace and beauty in his delineations. I have great faith, however, in the intrinsic worth and ultimate success of those more substantial attributes; and have, accordingly, the strongest impressions that the citations I have here given from Crabbe will strike more, and sink deeper into the minds of readers to whom they are new (or by whom they may have been partially forgotten), than any I have been able to present from other writers. [Jeffrey's four articles on Crabbe—the *Poems* of 1807 (April, 1808), *The Borough* (April, 1810), the *Tales* (November, 1812), and *Tales of the Hall* (July, 1819)—were all included in the republication.]

and truth of description of *The Village*; and since, we regretted that an author, who could write so well, should have written so little. From that time to the present we have heard little of Mr. Crabbe; and fear that he has been in a great measure lost sight of by the public, as well as by us. With a singular, and scarcely pardonable indifference to fame, he has remained, during this long interval, in patient or indolent repose; and, without making a single movement to maintain or advance the reputation he had acquired, has permitted others to usurp the attention which he was sure of commanding, and allowed himself to be nearly forgotten by a public which reckons upon being reminded of all the claims which the living have on its favour. His former publications, though of distinguished merit, were perhaps too small in volume to remain long the objects of general attention, and seem, by some accident, to have been jostled aside in the crowd of more clamorous competitors.

Yet, though the name of Crabbe has not hitherto been very common in the mouths of our poetical critics, we believe there are few real lovers of poetry to whom some of his sentiments and descriptions are not secretly familiar. There is a truth and a force in many of his delineations of rustic life, which is calculated to sink deep into the memory; and, being confirmed by daily observation, they are recalled upon innumerable occasions—when the ideal pictures of more fanciful authors have lost all their interest. For ourselves at least, we profess to be indebted to Mr. Crabbe for many of these strong impressions; and have known more than one of our unpoetical acquaintances, who declared they could never pass by a parish workhouse without thinking of the description of it they had read at school in the *Poetical Extracts*. The volume before us will renew, we trust, and extend many such

impressions. It contains all the former productions of the author, with about double their bulk of new matter; most of it in the same taste and manner of composition with the former; and some of a kind of which we have had no previous example in this author. The whole, however, is of no ordinary merit, and will be found, we have little doubt, a sufficient warrant for Mr. Crabbe to take his place as one of the most original, nervous, and pathetic poets of the present century.

His characteristic, certainly, is force and truth of description, joined for the most part to great selection and condensation of expression,—that kind of strength and originality which we meet with in Cowper, and that sort of diction and versification which we admire in *The Deserted Village* of Goldsmith, or *The Vanity of Human Wishes* of Johnson. If he can be said to have imitated the manner of any author, it is Goldsmith, indeed, who has been the object of his imitation; and yet his general train of thinking, and his views of society, are so extremely opposite, that, when *The Village* was first published, it was commonly considered as an antidote or an answer to the more captivating representations of *The Deserted Village*. Compared with this celebrated author, he will be found, we think, to have more vigour and less delicacy; and while he must be admitted to be inferior in the fine finish and uniform beauty of his composition, we cannot help considering him as superior both in the variety and the truth of his pictures. Instead of that uniform tint of pensive tenderness which overspreads the whole poetry of Goldsmith, we find in Mr. Crabbe many gleams of gaiety and humour. Though his habitual views of life are more gloomy than those of his rival, his poetical temperament seems far more cheerful; and when the occasions of sorrow and rebuke are gone by, he can collect himself for sarcastic

pleasantry, or unbend in innocent playfulness. His diction, though generally pure and powerful, is sometimes harsh, and sometimes quaint; and he has occasionally admitted a couplet or two in a state so unfinished, as to give a character of inelegance to the passages in which they occur. With a taste less disciplined and less fastidious than that of Goldsmith, he has, in our apprehension, a keener eye for observation, and a readier hand for the delineation of what he has observed. There is less poetical keeping in his whole performance; but the groups of which it consists are conceived, we think, with equal genius, and drawn with greater spirit as well as far greater fidelity.

It is not quite fair, perhaps, thus to draw a detailed parallel between a living poet, and one whose reputation has been sealed by death and by the immutable sentence of a surviving generation. Yet there are so few of his contemporaries to whom Mr. Crabbe bears any resemblance, that we can scarcely explain our opinion of his merit, without comparing him to some of his predecessors. There is one set of writers, indeed, from whose works those of Mr. Crabbe might receive all that elucidation which results from contrast, and from an entire opposition in all points of taste and opinion. We allude now to the Wordsworths, and the Southeys, and Coleridges, and all that ambitious fraternity, that, with good intentions and extraordinary talents, are labouring to bring back our poetry to the fantastical oddity and puling childishness of Withers, Quarles, or Marvell. These gentlemen write a great deal about rustic life, as well as Mr. Crabbe; and they even agree with him in dwelling much on its discomforts; but nothing can be more opposite than the views they take of the subject, or the manner in which they execute their representation of them.

Mr. Crabbe exhibits the common people of England pretty much as they are, and as they must appear to every one who will take the trouble of examining into their condition ; at the same time that he renders his sketches in a very high degree interesting and beautiful—by selecting what is most fit for description—by grouping them into such forms as must catch the attention or awake the memory—and by scattering over the whole such traits of moral sensibility, of sarcasm, and of deep reflection, as every one must feel to be natural, and own to be powerful. The gentlemen of the new school, on the other hand, scarcely ever condescend to take their subjects from any description of persons at all known to the common inhabitants of the world ; but invent for themselves certain whimsical and unheard-of beings, to whom they impute some fantastical combination of feelings, and then labour to excite our sympathy for them, either by placing them in incredible situations, or by some strained and exaggerated moralization of a vague and tragical description. Mr. Crabbe, in short, shows us something which we have all seen, or may see, in real life ; and draws from it such feelings and such reflections as every human being must acknowledge that it is calculated to excite. He delights us by the truth, and vivid and picturesque beauty of his representations, and by the force and pathos of the sensations with which we feel that they are connected. Mr. Wordsworth and his associates, on the other hand, introduce us to beings whose existence was not previously suspected by the acutest observers of nature ; and excite an interest for them—where they do excite any interest—more by an eloquent and refined analysis of their own capricious feelings, than by any obvious or intelligible ground of sympathy in their situation.

Those who are acquainted with the *Lyrical*

*Ballads*, or the more recent publications of Mr. Wordsworth, will scarcely deny the justice of this representation; but in order to vindicate it to such as do not enjoy that advantage, we must beg leave to make a few hasty references to the former, and by far the least exceptional of those productions.

A village schoolmaster, for instance, is a pretty common poetical character. Goldsmith has drawn him inimitably; so has Shenstone, with the slight change of sex; and Mr. Crabbe, in two passages, has followed their footsteps. Now, Mr. Wordsworth has a village schoolmaster also—a personage who makes no small figure in three or four of his poems. But by what traits is this worthy old gentleman delineated by the new poet? No pedantry—no innocent vanity of learning—no mixture of indulgence with the pride of power, and of poverty with the consciousness of rare acquirements. Every feature which belongs to the situation, or marks the character in common apprehension, is scornfully discarded by Mr. Wordsworth; who represents his grey-haired rustic pedagogue as a sort of half-crazy, sentimental person, overrun with fine feelings, constitutional merriment, and a most humorous melancholy. Here are the two stanzas in which this consistent and intelligible character is portrayed. The diction is at least as new as the conception.

> The sighs which Matthew heav'd were sighs
> Of one tir'd out with *fun* and *madness*;
> The tears which came to Matthew's eyes
> Were tears of light—*the oil of gladness.*
>
> Yet sometimes, when the secret cup
> Of still and serious thought went round,
> He seem'd as if he *drank it up*,
> He felt with spirit so profound.
> Thou *soul* of God's best *earthly mould*, &c.

A frail damsel again is a character common enough in all poems; and one upon which many fine and pathetic lines have been expended. Mr. Wordsworth has written more than three hundred on the subject: but, instead of new images of tenderness, or delicate representation of intelligible feelings, he has contrived to tell us nothing whatever of the unfortunate fair one, but that her name is Martha Ray; and that she goes up to the top of a hill, in a red cloak, and cries 'O misery!' All the rest of the poem is filled with a description of an old thorn and a pond, and of the silly stories which the neighbouring old women told about them.

The sports of childhood, and the untimely death of promising youth, is also a common topic for poetry. Mr. Wordsworth has made some blank verse about it; but, instead of the delightful and picturesque sketches with which so many authors of moderate talent have presented us on this inviting subject, all that he is pleased to communicate of *his* rustic child, is, that he used to amuse himself with shouting to the owls, and hearing them answer. To make amends for this brevity, the process of his mimicry is most accurately described.

> —— With fingers interwoven, both hands
> Press'd closely palm to palm, and to his mouth
> Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
> Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
> That they might answer him.

This is all we hear of him; and for the sake of this one accomplishment, we are told that the author has frequently stood mute, and gazed on his grave for half an hour together!

Love, and the fantasies of lovers, have afforded an ample theme to poets of all ages. Mr. Wordsworth,

however, has thought fit to compose a piece, illustrating this copious subject by one single thought. A lover trots away to see his mistress one fine evening, gazing all the way on the moon; when he comes to her door,

> O mercy! to myself I cried,
> If Lucy should be dead.

And there the poem ends!

Now, we leave it to any reader of common candour and discernment to say, whether these representations of character and sentiment are drawn from that eternal and universal standard of truth and nature, which every one is knowing enough to recognize, and no one great enough to depart from with impunity; or whether they are not formed, as we have ventured to allege, upon certain fantastic and affected peculiarities in the mind or fancy of the author, into which it is most improbable that many of his readers will enter, and which cannot, in some cases, be comprehended without much effort and explanation. Instead of multiplying instances of these wide and wilful aberrations from ordinary nature, it may be more satisfactory to produce the author's own admission of the narrowness of the plan upon which he writes, and of the very extraordinary circumstances which he himself sometimes thinks it necessary for his readers to keep in view, if they would wish to understand the beauty or propriety of his delineations.

A pathetic tale of guilt or superstition may be told, we are apt to fancy, by the poet himself, in his general character of poet, with full as much effect as by any other person. An old nurse, at any rate, or a monk or parish clerk, is always at hand to give grace to such a narration. None of these, however, would satisfy Mr. Wordsworth. He has written a long poem of this sort, in which he thinks it indispensably neces-

sary to apprise the reader, that he has endeavoured to represent the language and sentiments of a particular character—of which character he adds, 'the reader will have a general notion, if he has ever known a man, *a captain of a small trading vessel*, for example, who, being *past the middle age of life*, has retired upon *an annuity, or small independent income*, to some *village* or country town, of which he was *not a native*, or in which he had not been accustomed to live'!

Now, we must be permitted to doubt whether, among all the readers of Mr. Wordsworth (few or many), there is a single individual who has had the happiness of knowing a person of this very peculiar description; or who is capable of forming any sort of conjecture of the particular disposition and turn of thinking which such a combination of attributes would be apt to produce. To us, we will confess, the *annonce* appears as ludicrous and absurd as it would be in the author of an ode or an epic to say, 'Of this piece the reader will necessarily form a very erroneous judgement, unless he is apprised that it was written by a pale man in a green coat—sitting cross-legged on an oaken stool—with a scratch on his nose, and a spelling dictionary on the table.'[1]

[1] Some of our readers may have a curiosity to know in what manner this old annuitant captain does actually express himself in the village of his adoption. For their gratification, we annex the two first stanzas of his story; in which, with all the attention we have been able to bestow, we have been utterly unable to detect any traits that can be supposed to characterize either a seaman, an annuitant, or a stranger in a country town. It is a style, on the contrary, which we should ascribe, without hesitation, to a certain poetical fraternity in the West of England; and which, we verily believe, never was, and never will be, used by any one out of that fraternity.

There is a thorn—it looks so old, &c.

And this, it seems, is Nature, and Pathos, and Poetry!

From these childish and absurd affectations, we turn with pleasure to the manly sense and correct picturing of Mr. Crabbe; and, after being dazzled and made giddy with the elaborate raptures and obscure originalities of these new artists, it is refreshing to meet again with the spirit and nature of our old masters, in the nervous pages of the author now before us.

## (July, 1819.)

*Tales of the Hall.* By the Reverend George Crabbe. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. 670. London, 1819.

Mr. Crabbe is the greatest *mannerist*, perhaps, of all our living poets; and it is rather unfortunate that the most prominent features of his mannerism are not the most pleasing. The homely, quaint, and prosaic style—the flat, and often broken and jingling versification—the eternal full-lengths of low and worthless characters—with their accustomed garnishings of sly jokes and familiar moralizing—are all on the surface of his writings; and are almost unavoidably the things by which we are first reminded of him, when we take up any of his new productions. Yet they are *not* the things that truly constitute his peculiar manner; or give that character by which he will, and ought to be, remembered with future generations. It is plain enough, indeed, that these are things that will make nobody remembered—and can never, therefore, be really characteristic of some of the most original and powerful poetry that the world has ever seen.

Mr. C., accordingly, has other gifts; and those not less peculiar or less strongly marked than the blemishes with which they are contrasted;—an unrivalled and almost magical power of observation, resulting in descriptions so true to nature as to strike us rather

as transcripts than imitations—an anatomy of character and feeling not less exquisite and searching —an occasional touch of matchless tenderness—and a deep and dreadful pathetic, interspersed by fits, and strangely interwoven with the most minute and humble of his details. Add to all this the sure and profound sagacity of the remarks with which he every now and then startles us in the midst of very unambitious discussions;—and the weight and terseness of the maxims which he drops, like oracular responses, on occasions that give no promise of such a revelation;—and last, though not least, that sweet and seldom sounded chord of Lyrical inspiration, the lightest touch of which instantly charms away all harshness from his numbers, and all lowness from his themes—and at once exalts him to a level with the most energetic and inventive poets of his age.

These, we think, are the true characteristics of the genius of this great writer; and it is in their mixture with the oddities and defects to which we have already alluded, that the peculiarity of his manner seems to us substantially to consist. The ingredients may all of them be found, we suppose, in other writers; but their combination—in such proportions at least as occur in this instance—may safely be pronounced to be original.

Extraordinary, however, as this combination must appear, it does not seem very difficult to conceive in what way it may have arisen; and, so far from regarding it as a proof of singular humorousness, caprice, or affectation in the individual, we are rather inclined to hold that something approaching to it must be the natural result of a long habit of observation in a man of genius, possessed of that temper and disposition which is the usual accompaniment of such a habit; and that the same strangely compounded and

apparently incongruous assemblage of themes and sentiments would be frequently produced under such circumstances—if authors had oftener the courage to write from their own impressions, and had less fear of the laugh or wonder of the more shallow and barren part of their readers.

A great talent for observation, and a delight in the exercise of it—the power and the practice of dissecting and disentangling that subtle and complicated tissue of habit, and self-love, and affection, which constitute human character—seems to us, in all cases, to imply a contemplative, rather than an active disposition. It can only exist, indeed, where there is a good deal of social sympathy; for, without this, the occupation could excite no interest and afford no satisfaction—but only such a measure and sort of sympathy as is gratified by being a spectator, and not an actor on the great theatre of life—and leads its possessor rather to look with eagerness on the feats and the fortunes of others, than to take a share for himself in the game that is played before him. Some stirring and vigorous spirits there are, no doubt, in which this taste and talent is combined with a more thorough and effective sympathy; and leads to the study of men's characters by an actual and hearty participation in their various passions and pursuits; —though it is to be remarked that when such persons embody their observations in writing, they will generally be found to exhibit their characters in action, rather than to describe them in the abstract; and to let their various personages disclose themselves and their peculiarities, as it were spontaneously, and without help or preparation, in their ordinary conduct and speech—of all which we have a very splendid and striking example in the *Tales of My Landlord*, and the other pieces of that extraordinary writer. In the

common case, however, a great observer, we believe, will be found, pretty certainly, to be a person of a shy and retiring temper—who does not mingle enough with the people he surveys to be heated with their passions, or infected with their delusions—and who has usually been led, indeed, to take up the office of a looker-on, from some little infirmity of nerves, or weakness of spirits, which has unfitted him from playing a more active part on the busy scene of existence.

Now, it is very obvious, we think, that this contemplative turn, and this alienation from the vulgar pursuits of mankind, must, in the first place, produce a great contempt for most of those pursuits, and the objects they seek to obtain—a levelling of the factitious distinctions which human pride and vanity have established in the world, and a mingled scorn and compassion for the lofty pretensions under which men so often disguise the nothingness of their chosen occupations. When the many-coloured scene of life, with all its petty agitations, its shifting pomps, and perishable passions, is surveyed by one who does not mix in its business, it is impossible that it should not appear a very pitiable and almost ridiculous affair; or that the heart should not echo back the brief and emphatic exclamation of the mighty dramatist—

> —— Life 's a poor player,
> Who frets and struts his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more! —

Or the more sarcastic amplification of it, in the words of our great moral poet—

> Behold the Child, by Nature's kindly law,
> Pleas'd with a rattle, tickl'd with a straw!
> Some livelier plaything gives our Youth delight,
> A little louder, but as empty quite:

Scarfs, garters, gold our riper years engage;
And beads and prayer-books are the *toys* of Age!
Pleas'd with this bauble still as that before,
Till tir'd we sleep—and *Life's poor play is o'er*!

This is the more solemn view of the subject: but the first fruits of observation are most commonly found to issue in satire—the unmasking the vain pretenders to wisdom, and worth, and happiness, with whom society is infested, and holding up to the derision of mankind those meannesses of the great, those miseries of the fortunate, and those

Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise,

which the eye of a dispassionate observer so quickly detects under the glittering exterior by which they would fain be disguised—and which bring pretty much to a level the intellect, and morals, and enjoyments of the great mass of mankind.

This misanthropic end has unquestionably been by far the most common result of a habit of observation; and that in which its effects have most generally terminated:—yet we cannot bring ourselves to think that it is their just or natural termination. Something, no doubt, will depend on the temper of the individual, and the proportions in which the gall and the milk of human kindness have been originally mingled in his composition.—Yet satirists, we think, have not in general been ill-natured persons—and we are inclined rather to ascribe this limited and uncharitable application of their powers of observation to their love of fame and popularity, which are well known to be best secured by successful ridicule or invective—or, quite as probably, indeed, to the narrowness and insufficiency of the observations themselves, and the imperfection of their talents for their due conduct and

extension. It is certain, at least, we think, that the satirist makes use but of half the discoveries of the observer; and teaches but half—and the worser half—of the lessons which may be deduced from his occupation. He puts down, indeed, the proud pretensions of the great and arrogant, and levels the vain distinctions which human ambition has established among the brethren of mankind;—he

Bares the mean heart that lurks beneath a Star,

—and destroys the illusions which would limit our sympathy to the forward and figuring persons of this world—the favourites of fame and fortune. But the true result of observation should be, not so much to cast down the proud, as to raise up the lowly;—not so much to diminish our sympathy with the powerful and renowned, as to extend it to all who, in humbler conditions, have the same, or still higher claims on our esteem or affection.—It is not surely the natural consequence of learning to judge truly of the characters of men, that we should despise or be indifferent about them all; and, though we have learned to see through the false glare which plays round the envied summits of existence, and to know how little dignity or happiness, or worth, or wisdom, may sometimes belong to the possessors of power, and fortune, and learning, and renown,—it does not follow, by any means, that we should look upon the whole of human life as a mere deceit and imposture, or think the concerns of our species fit subjects only for scorn and derision. Our promptitude to admire and to envy will indeed be corrected, our enthusiasm abated, and our distrust of appearances increased; but the sympathies and affections of our nature will continue, and be better directed—our love of our kind will not be diminished—and our indulgence for their faults and

follies, if we read our lesson aright, will be signally strengthened and confirmed. The true and proper effect, therefore, of a habit of observation, and a thorough and penetrating knowledge of human character, will be, not to extinguish our sympathy, but to extend it—to turn, no doubt, many a throb of admiration, and many a sigh of love, into a smile of derision or of pity; but at the same time to reveal much that commands our homage and excites our affection, in those humble and unexplored regions of the heart and understanding, which never engage the attention of the incurious,—and to bring the whole family of mankind nearer to a level, by finding out latent merits as well as latent defects in all its members, and compensating the flaws that are detected in the boasted ornaments of life, by bringing to light the richness and the lustre that sleep in the mines beneath its surface.

We are afraid some of our readers may not at once perceive the application of these profound remarks to the subject immediately before us. But there are others, we doubt not, who do not need to be told that they are intended to explain how Mr. Crabbe, and other persons with the same gift of observation, should so often busy themselves with what may be considered as low and vulgar characters; and, declining all dealings with heroes and heroic topics, should not only venture to seek for an interest in the concerns of ordinary mortals, but actually intersperse small pieces of ridicule with their undignified pathos, and endeavour to make their readers look on their books with the same mingled feelings of compassion and amusement with which—unnatural as it may appear to the readers of poetry—they, and all judicious observers, actually look upon human life and human nature. This, we are persuaded, is the true

key to the greater part of the peculiarities of the author before us ; and though we have disserted upon it a little longer than was necessary, we really think it may enable our readers to comprehend him, and our remarks on him, something better than they could have done without it.

There is, as everybody must have felt, a strange mixture of satire and sympathy in all his productions —a great kindliness and compassion for the errors and sufferings of our poor human nature, but a strong distrust of its heroic virtues and high pretensions. His heart is always open to pity, and all the milder emotions—but there is little aspiration after the grand and sublime of character, nor very much encouragement for raptures and ecstasies of any description. These, he seems to think, are things rather too fine for the said poor human nature : and that, in our low and erring condition, it is a little ridiculous to pretend either to very exalted and immaculate virtue, or very pure and exquisite happiness. He not only never meddles, therefore, with the delicate distresses and noble fires of the heroes and heroines of tragic and epic fable, but may generally be detected indulging in a lurking sneer at the pomp and vanity of all such superfine imaginations—and turning from them, to draw men in their true postures and dimensions, and with all the imperfections that actually belong to their condition :—the prosperous and happy overshadowed with passing clouds of *ennui*, and disturbed with little flaws of bad humour and discontent—the great and wise beset at times with strange weaknesses and meannesses and paltry vexations—and even the most virtuous and enlightened falling far below the standard of poetical perfection—and stooping every now and then to paltry jealousies and prejudices—or sinking into shabby sensualities—or meditating on

their own excellence and importance, with a ludicrous and lamentable anxiety.

This is one side of the picture; and characterizes sufficiently the satirical vein of our author: but the other is the most extensive and important. In rejecting the vulgar sources of interest in poetical narratives, and reducing his ideal persons to the standard of reality, Mr. C. does by no means seek to extinguish the sparks of human sympathy within us, or to throw any damp on the curiosity with which we naturally explore the characters of each other. On the contrary, he has afforded new and more wholesome food for all those propensities—and, by placing before us those details which our pride or fastidiousness is so apt to overlook, has disclosed, in all their truth and simplicity, the native and unadulterated workings of those affections which are at the bottom of all social interest, and are really rendered *less* touching by the exaggerations of more ambitious artists—while he exhibits, with admirable force and endless variety, all those combinations of passions and opinions, and all that cross-play of selfishness and vanity, and indolence and ambition, and habit and reason, which make up the intellectual character of individuals, and present to every one an instructive picture of his neighbour, or himself. Seeing, by the perfection of his art, the master passions in their springs, and the high capacities in their rudiments—and having acquired the gift of tracing all the propensities and marking tendencies of our plastic nature, in their first slight indications, or even from the aspect of the disguises they so often assume, he does not need, in order to draw out his characters in all their life and distinctness, the vulgar demonstration of those striking and decided actions by which their maturity is proclaimed even to the careless and inattentive; but

delights to point out to his readers the seeds or tender filaments of those talents and feelings which wait only for occasion and opportunity to burst out and astonish the world—and to accustom them to trace, in characters and actions apparently of the most ordinary description, the self-same attributes that, under other circumstances, would attract universal attention, and furnish themes for the most popular and impassioned descriptions.

That he should not be guided in the choice of his subject by any regard to the rank or condition which his persons hold in society, may easily be imagined; and, with a view to the ends he aims at, might readily be forgiven. But we fear that his passion for observation, and the delight he takes in tracing out and analysing all the little traits that indicate character, and all the little circumstances that influence it, have sometimes led him to be careless about his selection of the instances in which it was to be exhibited, or at least to select them upon principles very different from those which give them an interest in the eyes of ordinary readers. For the purpose of mere anatomy, beauty of form or complexion are things quite indifferent; and the physiologist, who examines plants only to study their internal structure, and to make himself master of the contrivances by which their various functions are performed, pays no regard to the brilliancy of their hues, the sweetness of their odours, or the graces of their form. Those who come to him for the sole purpose of acquiring knowledge may participate perhaps in this indifference; but the world at large will wonder at them—and he will engage fewer pupils to listen to his instructions, than if he had condescended in some degree to consult their predilections in the beginning. It is the same case, we think, in many respects, with Mr. Crabbe. Rely-

ing, for the interest he is to produce, on the curious expositions he is to make of the elements of human character, or at least finding his own chief gratification in those subtle investigations, he seems to care very little upon what particular individuals he pitches for the purpose of these demonstrations. Almost every human mind, he seems to think, may serve to display that fine and mysterious mechanism which it is his delight to explore and explain ;—and almost every condition, and every history of life, afford occasions to show how it may be put into action, and pass through its various combinations. It seems, therefore, almost as if he had caught up the first dozen or two of persons that came across him in the ordinary walks of life,—and then fitting in his little window in their breasts, and applying his tests and instruments of observation, had set himself about such a minute and curious scrutiny of their whole habits, history, adventures, and dispositions, as he thought must ultimately create not only a familiarity, but an interest, which the first aspect of the subject was far enough from leading any one to expect. That he succeeds more frequently than could have been anticipated, we are very willing to allow. But we cannot help feeling, also, that a little more pains bestowed in the selection of his characters would have made his power of observation and description tell with tenfold effect ; and that, in spite of the exquisite truth of his delineations, and the fineness of the perceptions by which he was enabled to make them, it is impossible to take any considerable interest in many of his personages, or to avoid feeling some degree of fatigue at the minute and patient exposition that is made of all that belongs to them.

# THOMAS CAMPBELL

## (April, 1809.)

*Gertrude of Wyoming, a Pennsylvanian Tale; and other Poems.* By Thomas Campbell, *author of 'The Pleasures of Hope', &c.* 4to. pp. 136. London: Longman & Co., 1809.

. . . Beautiful as the greater part of this volume is, the public taste, we are afraid, has of late been too much accustomed to beauties of a more obtrusive and glaring kind, to be fully sensible of its merit. Without supposing that this taste has been in any great degree vitiated, or even imposed upon, by the babyism or the antiquarianism which have lately been versified for its improvement, we may be allowed to suspect that it has been somewhat dazzled by the splendour, and bustle, and variety of the most popular of our recent poems; and that the more modest colouring of truth and nature may, at this moment, seem somewhat cold and feeble. We have endeavoured, on former occasions, to do justice to the force and originality of some of those brilliant productions, as well as to the genius (fitted for much higher things) of their authors—and have little doubt of being soon called upon for a renewed tribute of applause. But we cannot help saying, in the meantime, that the work before us belongs to a class which comes nearer to our conception of pure and perfect poetry. Such productions do not, indeed, strike so strong a blow as the vehement effusions of our modern *Trouveurs*; but they are calculated, we think, to please more deeply, and to call out more permanently, those trains of emotion, in which the delight of poetry will probably be found to consist. They may not be so loudly nor

so universally applauded ; but their fame will probably endure longer, and they will be oftener recalled to mingle with the reveries of solitary leisure, or the consolations of real sorrow.

There is a sort of poetry, no doubt, as there is a sort of flowers, which can bear the broad sun and the ruffling winds of the world,—which thrive under the hands and eyes of indiscriminating multitudes, and please as much in hot and crowded saloons as in their own sheltered repositories ; but the finer and the purer sorts blossom only in the shade ; and never give out their sweets but to those who seek them amid the quiet and seclusion of the scenes which gave them birth. There are torrents and cascades which attract the admiration of tittering parties, and of which even the busy must turn aside to catch a transient glance : but ' the haunted stream ' steals through a still and a solitary landscape ; and its beauties are never revealed, but to him who strays, in calm contemplation, by its course, and follows its wanderings with undistracted and unimpatient admiration. There is a reason, too, for all this, which may be made more plain than by metaphors.

The highest delight which poetry produces does not arise from the mere passive perception of the images or sentiments which it presents to the mind ; but from the excitement which is given to its own internal activity, and the character which is impressed on the train of its spontaneous conceptions. Even the dullest reader generally sees more than is directly presented to him by the poet : but a lover of poetry always sees infinitely more ; and is often indebted to his author for little more than an impulse, or the key-note of a melody which his fancy makes out for itself. Thus, the effect of poetry depends more on the *fruitfulness* of the impressions to which it gives rise, than on their

own individual force or novelty; and the writers who possess the greatest powers of fascination are not those who present us with the greatest number of lively images or lofty sentiments, but who most successfully impart their own impulse to the current of our thoughts and feelings, and give the colour of their brighter conceptions to those which they excite in their readers. Now, upon a little consideration, it will probably appear, that the dazzling, and the busy and marvellous scenes which constitute the whole charm of some poems, are not so well calculated to produce this effect, as those more intelligible delineations which are borrowed from ordinary life, and coloured from familiar affections. The object is, to awaken in our minds a train of kindred emotions, and to excite our imaginations to work out for themselves a tissue of pleasing or impressive conceptions. But it seems obvious that this is more likely to be accomplished by surrounding us gradually with those objects and involving us in those situations with which we have long been accustomed to associate the feelings of the poet, than by startling us with some tale of wonder, or attempting to engage our affections for personages of whose character and condition we are unable to form any distinct conception. These, indeed, are more sure than the other to produce a momentary sensation, by the novelty and exaggeration with which they are commonly attended; but their power is spent at the first impulse: they do not strike root and germinate in the mind, like the seeds of its native feelings; nor propagate throughout the imagination that long series of delightful movements, which is only excited when the song of the poet is the echo of our familiar feelings.

It appears to us, therefore, that by far the most powerful and enchanting poetry is that which depends

for its effect upon the just representation of common feelings and common situations; and not on the strangeness of its incidents, or the novelty or exotic splendour of its scenes and characters. The difficulty is, no doubt, to give the requisite force, elegance, and dignity to these ordinary subjects, and to win a way for them to the heart, by that true and concise expression of natural emotion, which is among the rarest gifts of inspiration. To accomplish this, the poet must do much; and the reader something. The one must practise enchantment, and the other submit to it. The one must purify his conceptions from all that is low or artificial; and the other must lend himself gently to the impression, and refrain from disturbing it by any movement of worldly vanity, derision, or hardheartedness. In an advanced state of society, the expression of simple emotion is so obstructed by ceremony, or so distorted by affectation, that though the sentiment itself be still familiar to the greater part of mankind, the verbal representation of it is a task of the utmost difficulty. One set of writers, accordingly, finding the whole language of men and women too sophisticated for this purpose, have been obliged to go to the nursery for a more suitable phraseology; another has adopted the style of courtly Arcadians; and a third, that of mere Bedlamites. So much more difficult is it to express natural feelings, than to narrate battles, or describe prodigies![1] . . .

[1] We may compare a passage in the article on Crabbe's *Borough*,—'The images and affections that belong to our *universal* nature, are always, if tolerably represented, infinitely more captivating, in spite of their apparent commonness and simplicity, than those that are peculiar to certain situations, however they may come recommended by novelty or grandeur. The familiar feeling of maternal tenderness and anxiety, which is every day before our eyes, even in the brute creation—and the enchantment of youthful love, which is nearly the same in all characters, ranks, and situations—still contribute far more to the beauty

We close this volume, on the whole, with feelings of regret for its shortness, and of admiration for the genius of its author. There are but two noble sorts of poetry—the pathetic and the sublime; and we think he has given very extraordinary proofs of his talents for both. There is something, too, we will venture to add, in the style of many of his conceptions, which irresistibly impresses us with the conviction that he can do much greater things than he has hitherto accomplished; and leads us to regard him, even yet, as a poet of still greater promise than performance. It seems to us, as if the natural force and boldness of his ideas were habitually checked by a certain fastidious timidity, and an anxiety about the minor graces of correct and chastened composition. Certain it is, at least, that his greatest and most lofty flights have been made in those smaller pieces, about which, it is natural to think, he must have felt least solicitude; and that he has succeeded most splendidly where he must have been most free from the fear of failure. We wish any praises or exhortations of ours had the power to give him confidence in his own great talents; and hope earnestly that he will now meet with such encouragement as may set him above all restraints that proceed from apprehension; and induce him to give free scope to that genius, of which we are persuaded that the world has hitherto seen rather the grace than the richness.

and interest of poetry than all the misfortunes of princes, the jealousies of heroes, and the feats of giants, magicians, or ladies in armour. Every one can enter into the former set of feelings; and but a few into the latter. The one calls up a thousand familiar and long-remembered emotions—which are answered and reflected on every side by the kindred impressions which experience or observation have traced upon every memory: while the other lights up but a transient and unfruitful blaze, and passes away without perpetuating itself in any kindred and native sensation.']

# WALTER SCOTT

(April, 1805.)

*The Lay of the Last Minstrel: a Poem.* By Walter Scott, Esq. 4to, pp. 318. Edinburgh, Constable & Co.: London, Longman & Co., 1805[1].

We consider this poem as an attempt to transfer the refinements of modern poetry to the matter and the manner of the ancient metrical romance. The author, enamoured of the lofty visions of chivalry, and partial to the strains in which they were formerly embodied, seems to have employed all the resources of his genius in endeavouring to recall them to the favour and admiration of the public; and in adapting to the taste of modern readers a species of poetry which was once the delight of the courtly, but has long ceased to gladden any other eyes than those of the scholar and the antiquary. This is a romance, therefore, composed by a minstrel of the present day; or such a romance as we may suppose would have

[1] The Novels of Sir Walter Scott have, no doubt, cast his Poetry into the shade: and it is beyond question that *they* must always occupy the highest and most conspicuous place in that splendid trophy which his genius has reared to his memory. Yet, when I recollect the vehement admiration it once excited, I cannot part with the belief that there is much in his poetry also, which our age should not allow to be forgotten. And it is under this impression that I now venture to reprint my contemporary notices of the two poems which I think produced the greatest effect at the time: the one as *the first* and most strikingly original of the whole series; the other as being on the whole the best, and also as having led me to make some remarks, not only on the general character of the author's genius, but on the peculiar perils of *very popular* poetry—of which the time that has since elapsed has afforded some curious illustrations.

been written in modern times, if that style of composition had continued to be cultivated, and partaken consequently of the improvements which every branch of literature has received since the time of its desertion.

Upon this supposition, it was evidently Mr. Scott's business to retain all that was good, and to reject all that was bad in the models upon which he was to form himself; adding, at the same time, all the interest and beauty which could possibly be assimilated to the manner and spirit of his originals. It was his duty, therefore, to reform the rambling, obscure, and interminable narratives of the ancient romancers—to moderate their digressions—to abridge or retrench their unmerciful or needless descriptions —and to expunge altogether those feeble and prosaic passages, the rude stupidity of which is so apt to excite the derision of a modern reader. At the same time, he was to rival, if he could, the force and vivacity of their minute and varied representations—the characteristic simplicity of their pictures of manners —the energy and conciseness with which they frequently describe great events—and the lively colouring and accurate drawing by which they give the effect of reality to every scene they undertake to delineate. In executing this arduous task, he was permitted to avail himself of all that variety of style and manner which had been sanctioned by the ancient practice; and bound to embellish his performance with all the graces of diction and versification which could be reconciled to the simplicity and familiarity of the minstrel's song.

With what success Mr. Scott's efforts have been attended in the execution of this adventurous undertaking, our readers will be better able to judge in the sequel: but, in the mean time, we may safely venture

to assert, that he has produced a very beautiful and entertaining poem, in a style which may fairly be considered as original; and which will be allowed to afford satisfactory evidence of the genius of the author, even though he should not succeed in converting the public to his own opinion as to the interest or dignity of the subject. We are ourselves inclined indeed to suspect that his partiality for the strains of antiquity has imposed a little upon the severity of his judgement, and impaired the beauty of the present imitation, by directing his attention rather to what was characteristic, than to what was unexceptionable in his originals. Though he has spared too many of their faults, however, he has certainly improved upon their beauties: and while we can scarcely help regretting that the feuds of border chieftains should have monopolized as much poetry as might have served to immortalize the whole baronage of the empire, we are the more inclined to admire the interest and magnificence which he has contrived to communicate to a subject so unpromising.

Whatever may be thought of the conduct of the main story, the manner of introducing it must be allowed to be extremely poetical. An aged minstrel who had 'harped to King Charles the Good', and learned to love his art at a time when it was honoured by all that was distinguished in rank or in genius, having fallen into neglect and misery in the evil days of the usurpation, and the more frivolous gaieties or bitter contentions of the succeeding reigns, is represented as wandering about the Border in poverty and solitude, a few years after the Revolution. In this situation he is driven, by want and weariness, to seek shelter in the Border castle of the Duchess of Buccleuch and Monmouth: and being cheered by the hospitality of his reception, offers to sing 'an

ancient strain', relating to the old warriors of her family; and after some fruitless attempts to recall the long-forgotten melody, pours forth *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, in six cantos, very skilfully divided by some recurrence to his own situation, and some complimentary interruptions from his noble auditors.

The construction of a fable seems by no means the *forte* of our modern poetical writers; and no great artifice, in that respect, was to be expected, perhaps, from an imitator of the ancient romancers. Mr. Scott, indeed, has himself insinuated, that he considered the story as an object of very subordinate importance; and that he was less solicitous to deliver a regular narrative, than to connect such a series of incidents as might enable him to introduce the manners he had undertaken to delineate, and the imagery with which they were associated. Though the conception of the fable is, probably from these causes, exceedingly defective, it is proper to lay a short sketch of it before our readers, both for the gratification of their curiosity, and to facilitate the application of the remarks we may be afterwards tempted to offer. . . .

From this little sketch of the story, our readers will easily perceive that, however well calculated it may be for the introduction of picturesque imagery, or the display of extraordinary incident, it has but little pretension to the praise of a regular or coherent narrative. The magic of the lady, the midnight visit to Melrose, and the mighty book of the enchanter, which occupy nearly one-third of the whole poem, and engross the attention of the reader for a long time after the commencement of the narrative, are of no use whatsoever in the subsequent development of the fable, and do not contribute, in any degree, either to the production or explanation of the incidents that follow. The whole character and proceedings of the

goblin page, in like manner, may be considered as merely episodical; for though he is employed in some of the subordinate incidents, it is remarkable that no material part of the fable requires the intervention of supernatural agency. The young Buccleuch might have wandered into the wood, although he had not been decoyed by a goblin; and the dame might have given her daughter to the deliverer of her son, although she had never listened to the prattlement of the river and mountain spirits. There is, besides all this, a great deal of gratuitous and digressive description, and the whole sixth canto may be said to be redundant. The story should naturally end with the union of the lovers; and the account of the feast, and the minstrelsy that solemnized their betrothment, is a sort of epilogue, superadded after the catastrophe is complete.

But though we feel it to be our duty to point out these obvious defects in the structure of the fable, we have no hesitation in conceding to the author, that the fable is but a secondary consideration in performances of this nature. A poem is intended to please by the images it suggests, and the feelings it inspires; and if it contain delightful images and affecting sentiments, our pleasure will not be materially impaired by some slight want of probability or coherence in the narrative by which they are connected. The *callida junctura* of its members is a grace, no doubt, which ought always to be aimed at; but the quality of the members themselves is a consideration of far higher importance; and that by which alone the success and character of the work must be ultimately decided. The adjustment of a fable may indicate the industry or the judgement of the writer; but the Genius of the poet can only be shown in his management of its successive incidents. In these

more essential particulars, Mr. Scott's merits, we think, are unequivocal. He writes throughout with the spirit and force of a poet; and though he occasionally discovers a little too much, perhaps, of the 'brave neglect', and is frequently inattentive to the delicate propriety and scrupulous correctness of his diction, he compensates for those defects by the fire and animation of his whole composition, and the brilliant colouring and prominent features of the figures with which he has enlivened it. . . .

In the very first rank of poetical excellence we are inclined to place the introductory and concluding lines of every canto; in which the ancient strain is suspended, and the feelings and situation of the Minstrel himself described in the words of the author. The elegance and the beauty of this *setting*, if we may so call it, though entirely of modern workmanship, appears to us to be fully more worthy of admiration than the bolder relief of the antiques which it encloses; and leads us to regret that the author should have wasted, in imitation and antiquarian researches, so much of those powers which seem fully equal to the task of raising him an independent reputation. . . .

The ancient romance owes much of its interest to the lively picture which it affords of the times of chivalry, and of those usages, manners, and institutions which we have been accustomed to associate in our minds, with a certain combination of magnificence with simplicity, and ferocity with romantic honour. The representations contained in those performances, however, are for the most part too rude and naked to give complete satisfaction. The execution is always extremely unequal; and though the writer sometimes touches upon the appropriate feeling with great effect and felicity, still this appears to be done more by accident than design; and he wanders away immedi-

ately into all sorts of ludicrous or uninteresting details, without any apparent consciousness of incongruity. These defects Mr. Scott has corrected with admirable address and judgement in the greater part of the work now before us; and while he has exhibited a very striking and impressive picture of the old feudal usages and institutions, he has shown still greater talent in engrafting upon those descriptions all the tender or magnanimous emotions to which the circumstances of the story naturally give rise. Without impairing the antique air of the whole piece, or violating the simplicity of the ballad style, he has contrived in this way to impart a much greater dignity and more powerful interest to his production, than could ever be attained by the unskilful and unsteady delineations of the old romancers. Nothing, we think, can afford a finer illustration of this remark, than the opening stanzas of the whole poem; they transport us at once into the days of knightly daring and feudal hostility; at the same time that they suggest, and in a very interesting way, all those softer sentiments which arise out of some parts of the description. . . .

From the various extracts we have now given,[1] our readers will be enabled to form a tolerably correct judgement of this poem; and if they are pleased with these portions of it which have now been exhibited, we may venture to assure them that they will not be disappointed by the perusal of the whole. The whole night-journey of Deloraine—the opening of the wizard's tomb—the march of the English battle—

[1 Over 350 lines in all, including 'a considerable part of the introduction', the opening of Canto I, the description of Melrose, the account of the 'beacon-blaze of war' (III, xxiv–xxvii), the 'beautiful verses' introducing Canto IV ('Sweet Teviot', &c.), and the whole of 'Rosabelle'.]

and the parley before the walls of the castle, are all executed with the same spirit and poetical energy, which we think is conspicuous in the specimens we have already extracted; and a great variety of short passages occur in every part of the poem, which are still more striking and meritorious, though it is impossible to detach them, without injury, in the form of a quotation. It is but fair to apprise the reader, on the other hand, that he will meet with very heavy passages, and with a variety of details which are not likely to interest any one but a Borderer or an antiquary. We like very well to hear 'of the Gallant Chief of Otterburne', or 'the Dark Knight of Liddisdale', and feel the elevating power of great names, when we read of the tribes that mustered to the war, 'beneath the crest of old Dunbar, and Hepburn's mingled banners.' But we really cannot so far sympathize with the local partialities of the author, as to feel any glow of patriotism or ancient virtue in hearing of the *Todrig* or *Johnston* clans, or of *Elliots*, *Armstrongs*, and *Tinlinns*; still less can we relish the introduction of *Black John of Athelstane*, *Whitslade the Hawk*, *Arthur-fire-the-braes*, *Red Roland Forster*, or any other of those worthies who

> Sought the beeves that made their broth,
> In Scotland and in England both,

into a poem which has any pretensions to seriousness or dignity. The ancient metrical romance might have admitted those homely personalities; but the present age will not endure them: and Mr. Scott must either sacrifice his Border prejudices, or offend all his readers in the other parts of the empire.

There are many passages, as we have already insinuated, which have the general character of heaviness; such as the minstrel's account of his preceptor,

and Delcraine's lamentation over the dead body of Musgrave: but the goblin page is, in our opinion, the capital deformity of the poem. We have already said that the whole machinery is useless: but the magic studies of the lady, and the rifled tomb of Michael Scott, give occasion to so much admirable poetry, that we can on no account consent to part with them. The page, on the other hand, is a perpetual burden to the poet, and to the reader: it is an undignified and improbable fiction, which excites neither terror, admiration, nor astonishment; but needlessly debases the strain of the whole work, and excites at once our incredulity and contempt. He is not a 'tricksy spirit', like Ariel, with whom the imagination is irresistibly enamoured; nor a tiny monarch, like Oberon, disposing of the destinies of mortals: he rather appears to us to be an awkward sort of a mongrel between Puck and Caliban; of a servile and brutal nature; and limited in his powers to the indulgence of petty malignity and the infliction of despicable injuries. Besides this objection to his character, his existence has no support from any general or established superstition. Fairies and devils, ghosts, angels, and witches, are creatures with whom we are all familiar, and who excite in all classes of mankind emotions with which we can easily be made to sympathize. But the story of Gilpin Horner can never have been believed out of the village where he is said to have made his appearance; and has no claims upon the credulity of those who were not originally of his acquaintance. There is nothing at all interesting or elegant in the scenes of which he is the hero; and in reading those passages, we really could not help suspecting that they did not stand in the romance when the aged minstrel recited it to the Royal Charles and his mighty earls, but were

inserted afterwards to suit the taste of the cottagers among whom he begged his bread on the Border. We entreat Mr. Scott to inquire into the grounds of this suspicion; and to take advantage of any decent pretext he can lay hold of for purging the *Lay* of this ungraceful intruder. We would also move for a *Quo Warranto* against the spirits of the river and the mountain; for though they are come of a very high lineage, we do not know what lawful business they could have at Branksome Castle in the year 1550.

Of the diction of this poem we have but little to say. From the extracts we have already given, our readers will perceive that the versification is in the highest degree irregular and capricious. The nature of the work entitled Mr. Scott to some licence in this respect, and he often employs it with a very pleasing effect; but he has frequently exceeded its just limits, and presented us with such combinations of metre as must put the teeth of his readers, we think, into some jeopardy. He has, when he pleases, a very melodious and sonorous style of versification, but often composes with inexcusable negligence and rudeness. There is a great number of lines in which the verse can only be made out by running the words together in a very unusual manner; and some appear to us to have no pretension to the name of verses at all. What apology, for instance, will Mr. Scott make for the last of these two lines?—

> For when in studious mood he pac'd
> St. Kentigern's hall;

or for these?—

> How the brave boy, in future war,
> Should tame the unicorn's pride.

We have called the negligence which could leave

such lines as these in a poem of this nature inexcusable ; because it is perfectly evident, from the general strain of his composition, that Mr. Scott has a very accurate ear for the harmony of versification, and that he composes with a facility which must lighten the labour of correction. There are some smaller faults in the diction which might have been as well corrected also : there is too much alliteration ; and he reduplicates his words too often. We have 'never, never', several times ; besides, ''tis o'er, 'tis o'er'—'in vain, in vain'—''tis done, 'tis done' ; and several other echoes as ungraceful.

We will not be tempted to say anything more of this poem. Although it does not contain any great display of what is properly called invention, it indicates perhaps as much vigour and originality of poetical genius as any performance which has been lately offered to the public. The locality of the subject is likely to obstruct its popularity ; and the author, by confining himself in a great measure to the description of manners and personal adventures, has forfeited the attraction which might have been derived from the delineation of rural scenery. But he has manifested a degree of genius which cannot be overlooked, and given indication of talents that seem well worthy of being enlisted in the service of the epic muse.

The notes, which contain a great treasure of Border history and antiquarian learning, are too long, we think, for the general reader. The form of the publication is also too expensive ; and we hope soon to see a smaller edition, with an abridgement of the notes, for the use of the mere lovers of poetry.

(AUGUST, 1810.)

*The Lady of the Lake: a Poem.* By WALTER SCOTT. Second Edition. 8vo, pp. 434. 1810.

. . . THE great secret of his popularity, and the leading characteristic of his poetry, appear to us to consist evidently in this, that he has made more use of common topics, images, and expressions, than any original poet of later times; and, at the same time, displayed more genius and originality than any recent author who has worked in the same materials. By the latter peculiarity, he has entitled himself to the admiration of every description of readers; by the former, he is recommended in an especial manner to the inexperienced—at the hazard of some little offence to the more cultivated and fastidious.

In the choice of his subjects, for example, he does not attempt to interest merely by fine observation or pathetic sentiment, but takes the assistance of a story, and enlists the reader's curiosity among his motives for attention. Then his characters are all selected from the most common *dramatis personae* of poetry —kings, warriors, knights, outlaws, nuns, minstrels, secluded damsels, wizards, and true lovers. He never ventures to carry us into the cottage of the modern peasant, like Crabbe or Cowper; nor into the bosom of domestic privacy, like Campbell; nor among creatures of the imagination, like Southey or Darwin. Such personages, we readily admit, are not in themselves so interesting or striking as those to whom Mr. Scott has devoted himself; but they are far less familiar in poetry—and are therefore more likely, perhaps, to engage the attention of those to whom poetry is familiar. In the management of the passions, again, Mr. Scott appears to us to have pursued the

same popular and comparatively easy course. He has raised all the most familiar and poetical emotions, by the most obvious aggravations, and in the most compendious and judicious ways. He has dazzled the reader with the splendour, and even warmed him with the transient heat of various affections; but he has nowhere fairly kindled him with enthusiasm, or melted him into tenderness. Writing for the world at large, he has wisely abstained from attempting to raise any passion to a height to which worldly people could not be transported; and contented himself with giving his reader the chance of feeling, as a brave, kind, and affectionate gentleman must often feel in the ordinary course of his existence, without trying to breathe into him either that lofty enthusiasm which disdains the ordinary business and amusements of life, or that quiet and deep sensibility which unfits for most of its pursuits. With regard to diction and imagery, too, it is quite obvious that Mr. Scott has not aimed at writing either in a very pure or a very consistent style. He seems to have been anxious only to strike, and to be easily and universally understood; and, for this purpose, to have culled the most glittering and conspicuous expressions of the most popular authors, and to have interwoven them in splendid confusion with his own nervous diction and irregular versification. Indifferent whether he coins or borrows, and drawing with equal freedom on his memory and his imagination, he goes boldly forward, in full reliance on a never-failing abundance; and dazzles, with his richness and variety, even those who are most apt to be offended with his glare and irregularity. There is nothing, in Mr. Scott, of the severe and majestic style of Milton—or of the terse and fine composition of Pope—or of the elaborate elegance and melody of Campbell—or even of the flowing and re-

dundant diction of Southey.—But there is a medley of bright images and glowing words, set carelessly and loosely together—a diction, tinged successively with the careless richness of Shakespeare, the harshness and antique simplicity of the old romances, the homeliness of vulgar ballads and anecdotes, and the sentimental glitter of the most modern poetry—passing from the borders of the ludicrous to those of the sublime—alternately minute and energetic—sometimes artificial, and frequently negligent,—but always full of spirit and vivacity—abounding in images that are striking, at first sight, to minds of every contexture—and never expressing a sentiment which it can cost the most ordinary reader any exertion to comprehend.

Such seem to be the leading qualities that have contributed to Mr. Scott's popularity; and as some of them are obviously of a kind to diminish his merit in the eyes of more fastidious judges, it is but fair to complete this view of his peculiarities by a hasty notice of such of them as entitle him to unqualified admiration;—and here it is impossible not to be struck with that vivifying spirit of strength and animation which pervades all the inequalities of his composition, and keeps constantly on the mind of the reader the impression of great power, spirit, and intrepidity. There is nothing cold, creeping, or feeble, in all Mr. Scott's poetry—no laborious littleness, or puling classical affectation. He has his failures, indeed, like other people; but he always attempts vigorously: and never fails in his immediate object, without accomplishing something far beyond the reach of an ordinary writer. Even when he wanders from the paths of pure taste, he leaves behind him the footsteps of a powerful genius; and moulds the most humble of his materials into a form worthy of a nobler

substance. Allied to this inherent vigour and animation, and in a great degree derived from it, is that air of facility and freedom which adds so peculiar a grace to most of Mr. Scott's compositions. There is certainly no living poet whose works seem to come from him with so much ease, or who so seldom appears to labour, even in the most burdensome parts of his performance. He seems, indeed, never to think either of himself or his reader, but to be completely identified and lost in the personages with whom he is occupied; and the attention of the reader is consequently either transferred, unbroken, to their adventures, or, if it glance back for a moment to the author, it is only to think how much more might be done, by putting forth that strength at full, which has, without effort, accomplished so many wonders. It is owing partly to these qualities, and partly to the great variety of his style, that Mr. Scott is much less frequently tedious than any other bulky poet with whom we are acquainted. His store of images is so copious, that he never dwells upon one long enough to produce weariness in the reader; and, even where he deals in borrowed or in tawdry wares, the rapidity of his transitions, and the transient glance with which he is satisfied as to each, leave the critic no time to be offended, and hurry him forward, along with the multitude, enchanted with the brilliancy of the exhibition. Thus, the very frequency of his deviations from pure taste, comes, in some sort, to constitute their apology; and the profusion and variety of his faults to afford a new proof of his genius.

These, we think, are the general characteristics of Mr. Scott's poetry. Among his minor peculiarities, we might notice his singular talent for description, and especially for the description of scenes abounding in *motion* or *action* of any kind. In this department,

indeed, we conceive him to be almost without a rival, either among modern or ancient poets; and the character and process of his descriptions are as extraordinary as their effect is astonishing. He places before the eyes of his readers a more distinct and complete picture, perhaps, than any other artist ever presented by mere words; and yet he does not (like Crabbe) enumerate all the visible parts of the subject with any degree of minuteness, nor confine himself, by any means, to what is visible. The singular merit of his delineations, on the contrary, consists in this, that, with a few bold and abrupt strokes, he finishes a most spirited outline,—and then instantly kindles it by the sudden light and colour of some moral affection. There are none of his fine descriptions, accordingly, which do not derive a great part of their clearness and picturesque effect, as well as their interest, from the quantity of character and moral expression which is thus blended with their details, and which, so far from interrupting the conception of the external object, very powerfully stimulate the fancy of the reader to complete it; and give a grace and a spirit to the whole representation, of which we do not know where to look for any other example.

Another very striking peculiarity in Mr. Scott's poetry, is the air of freedom and nature which he has contrived to impart to most of his distinguished characters; and with which no poet more modern than Shakespeare has ventured to represent personages of such dignity. We do not allude here merely to the genuine familiarity and homeliness of many of his scenes and dialogues, but to that air of gaiety and playfulness in which persons of high rank seem, from time immemorial, to have thought it necessary to array, not their courtesy only, but their generosity and their hostility. This tone of good society, Mr.

Scott has shed over his higher characters with great grace and effect; and has, in this way, not only made his representations much more faithful and true to nature, but has very agreeably relieved the monotony of that tragic solemnity which ordinary writers appear to think indispensable to the dignity of poetical heroes and heroines. We are not sure, however, whether he has not occasionally exceeded a little in the use of this ornament; and given, now and then, too coquettish and trifling a tone to discussions of weight and moment.

Mr. Scott has many other characteristic excellences:—but we have already detained our readers too long with this imperfect sketch of his poetical character, and must proceed, without further delay, to give them some account of the work which is now before us. Of this, upon the whole, we are inclined to think more highly than of either of his former publications. We are more sure, however, that it has fewer faults, than that it has greater beauties; and as its beauties bear a strong resemblance to those with which the public has already been made familiar in those celebrated works, we should not be surprised if its popularity were less splendid and remarkable. For our own parts, however, we are of opinion, that it will be oftener read hereafter than either of them; and that, if it had appeared first in the series, *their* reception would have been less favourable than that which it has experienced. It is more polished in its diction, and more regular in its versification; the story is constructed with infinitely more skill and address; there is a greater proportion of pleasing and tender passages, with much less antiquarian detail; and, upon the whole, a larger variety of characters, more artfully and judiciously contrasted. There is nothing so fine, perhaps, as the battle in *Marmion*—or so picturesque as some of the scattered sketches in the

*Lay*; but there is a richness and a spirit in the whole piece, which does not pervade either of these poems —a profusion of incident and a shifting brilliancy of colouring, that reminds us of the witchery of Ariosto —and a constant elasticity, and occasional energy, which seem to belong more peculiarly to the author now before us. . . .

We must be permitted to express our disappointment and regret at finding the general cast of the characters and incidents so much akin to those of Mr. Scott's former publications. When we heard that the author of the *Lay* and of *Marmion* was employed upon a *Highland* story, we certainly expected to be introduced to a new creation; and to bid farewell, for awhile, to the knights, squires, courtiers, and chivalry of the low country:—but here they are all upon us again, in their old characters, and nearly in their old costume. The same age—the same sovereign—the same manners—the same ranks of society—the same tone, both for courtesy and for defiance. Loch Katrine, indeed, is more picturesque than St. Mary's Loch; and Roderick Dhu and his clan have some features of novelty:—but the Douglas and the King are the leading personages; and the whole interest of the story turns upon persons and events having precisely the same character and general aspect with those which gave their peculiar colour to the former poems. It is honourable to Mr. Scott's genius, no doubt, that he has been able to interest the public so deeply with this third presentment of the same chivalrous scenes; but we cannot help thinking, that both his glory and our gratification would have been greater, if he had changed his hand more completely, and actually given us a true Celtic story, with all its drapery and accompaniments in a corresponding style of decoration. . . .

That he may injure his popularity by the mere profusion of his publications, is no doubt possible; though many of the most celebrated poets have been among the most voluminous: but that the public may gain by this liberality, does not seem to admit of any question. If our poetical treasures were increased by the publication of *Marmion* and the *Lady of the Lake*, notwithstanding the existence of great faults in both those works, it is evident that we should be still richer if we possessed fifty poems of the same merit; and, therefore, it is for our interest, whatever it may be as to his, that their author's muse should continue as prolific as she has hitherto been. If Mr. Scott will only vary his subjects a little more, indeed, we think we might engage to insure his own reputation against any material injury from their rapid parturition; and, as we entertain very great doubts whether much greater pains would enable him to write much better poetry, we would rather have two beautiful poems, with the present *quantum* of faults—than one, with only one-tenth part less alloy. He will always be a poet, we fear, to whom the fastidious will make great objections; but he may easily find, in his popularity, a compensation for their scruples. He has *the jury* hollow in his favour; and though *the court* may think that its directions have not been sufficiently attended to, it will not quarrel with the verdict.

[Jeffrey did not include the review of *Marmion* (April, 1808) in the collected edition of his essays, nor the later reviews of *Don Roderick* (August, 1811) and *The Lord of the Isles* (February, 1815). Lockhart considered the review of *The Lady of the Lake* 'the best specimen of contemporary criticism on Scott's poetry'. (*Life of Scott*, 1839, iii, 254.)]

# THE WAVERLEY NOVELS

## (November, 1814.)

*Waverley, or 'Tis Sixty Years Since.* In three volumes 12mo. pp. 1112. Third Edition. Edinburgh, 1814 [1].

It is wonderful what genius and adherence to nature will do, in spite of all disadvantages. Here is a thing obviously very hastily, and, in many places, somewhat unskilfully written—composed, one-half of it, in a dialect unintelligible to four-fifths of the reading population of the country—relating to a period too recent to be romantic, and too far gone by to be familiar—and published, moreover, in a quarter of the island where materials and talents for novel-

[1] I have been a good deal at a loss what to do with these famous novels of Sir Walter. On the one hand, I could not bring myself to let this collection go forth, without *some* notice of works which, for many years together, had occupied and delighted me more than anything else that ever came under my critical survey: while, on the other, I could not but feel that it would be absurd, and in some sense almost dishonest, to fill these pages with long citations from books which, for the last twenty-five years, have been in the hands of at least fifty times as many readers as are ever likely to look into this publication—and are still as familiar to the generation which has last come into existence, as to those who can yet remember the sensation produced by their first appearance. In point of fact I was informed, but the other day, by Mr. Cadell, that he had actually sold not less than *sixty thousand volumes* of these extraordinary productions, in the course of the preceding year! and that the demand for them, instead of slackening, had been for some time sensibly on the increase. In these circumstances I think I may safely assume that their contents are still so perfectly known as not to require any citations to introduce such of the remarks originally made on them as I may now wish to repeat. And I have therefore come to the determination of omitting almost all the quotations, and most of the detailed abstracts which appeared in the

writing have been supposed to be equally wanting: and yet, by the mere force and truth and vivacity of its colouring, already casting the whole tribe of ordinary novels into the shade, and taking its place rather with the most popular of our modern poems, than with the rubbish of provincial romances.

The secret of this success, we take it, is merely that the author is a man of Genius; and that he has, notwithstanding, had virtue enough to be true to Nature throughout; and to content himself, even in the marvellous parts of his story, with copying from actual existences, rather than from the phantasms of his own imagination. The charm which this communicates to all works that deal in the representation of human actions and character, is more readily felt than understood; and operates with unfailing efficacy even upon those who have no acquaintance with the originals from which the picture has been borrowed.

original reviews; and to retain only the general criticism, and character, or estimate of each performance—together with such incidental observations as may have been suggested by the tenor or success of these wonderful productions. By this course, no doubt, a sad shrinking will be effected in the primitive dimensions of the articles which are here reproduced; and may probably give to what is retained something of a naked and jejune appearance. If it should be so, I can only say that I do not see how I could have helped it: and after all it may not be altogether without interest to see, from a contemporary record, what were the first impressions produced by the appearance of this new luminary on our horizon; while the secret of the authorship was yet undivulged, and before the rapid accumulation of its glories had forced on the dullest spectator a sense of its magnitude and power. I may venture perhaps also to add, that some of the general speculations of which these reviews suggested the occasion, may probably be found as well worth preserving as most of those which have been elsewhere embodied in this experimental, and somewhat hazardous, publication.

Though living in familiar intercourse with Sir Walter, I need scarcely say that I was not in the secret of his authorship; and in truth had no assurance of the fact, till the time of its public promulgation.

It requires no ordinary talent, indeed, to choose such realities as may outshine the bright imaginations of the inventive, and so to combine them as to produce the most advantageous effect; but when this is once accomplished, the result is sure to be something more firm, impressive, and engaging, than can ever be produced by mere fiction.

The object of the work before us, was evidently to present a faithful and animated picture of the manners and state of society that prevailed in this northern part of the island in the earlier part of last century; and the author has judiciously fixed upon the era of the Rebellion in 1745, not only as enriching his pages with the interest inseparably attached to the narration of such occurrences, but as affording a fair opportunity for bringing out all the contrasted principles and habits which distinguished the different classes of persons who then divided the country, and formed among them the basis of almost all that was peculiar in the national character. That unfortunate contention brought conspicuously to light, and for the last time, the fading image of feudal chivalry in the mountains, and vulgar fanaticism in the plains; and startled the more polished parts of the land with the wild but brilliant picture of the devoted valour, incorruptible fidelity, patriarchal brotherhood, and savage habits, of the Celtic clans, on the one hand, —and the dark, intractable, and domineering bigotry of the Covenanters on the other. Both aspects of society had indeed been formerly prevalent in other parts of the country,—but had there been so long superseded by more peaceful habits, and milder manners, that their vestiges were almost effaced, and their very memory nearly extinguished. The feudal principalities had been destroyed in the South, for near 300 years,—and the dominion of the Puritans

from the time of the Restoration. When the glens and banded clans of the central Highlands, therefore, were opened up to the gaze of the English, in the course of that insurrection, it seemed as if they were carried back to the days of the Heptarchy; and when they saw the array of the West-country Whigs, they might imagine themselves transported to the age of Cromwell. The effect, indeed, is almost as startling at the present moment; and one great source of the interest which the volumes before us undoubtedly possess, is to be sought in the surprise that is excited by discovering that in our own country, and almost in our own age, manners and characters existed, and were conspicuous, which we had been accustomed to consider as belonging to remote antiquity, or extravagant romance.

The way in which they are here represented must satisfy every reader, we think, by an inward *tact* and conviction, that the delineation has been made from actual experience and observation;—experience and observation employed perhaps only on a few surviving relics and specimens of what was familiar a little earlier,—but generalized from instances sufficiently numerous and complete, to warrant all that may have been added to the portrait.—And, indeed, the existing records and vestiges of the more extraordinary parts of the representation are still sufficiently abundant, to satisfy all who have the means of consulting them, as to the perfect accuracy of the picture. The great traits of Clannish dependence, pride, and fidelity, may still be detected in many districts of the Highlands, though they do not now adhere to the chieftains when they mingle in general society; and the existing contentions of Burghers, and Antiburghers, and Cameronians, though shrunk into comparative insignificance, and left, indeed, without protection to

the ridicule of the profane, may still be referred to, as complete verifications of all that is here stated about Gifted Gilfillan, or Ebenezer Cruickshanks. The traits of Scottish national character in the lower ranks can still less be regarded as antiquated or traditional; nor is there anything in the whole compass of the work which gives us a stronger impression of the nice observation and graphical talent of the author, than the extraordinary fidelity and felicity with which all the inferior agents in the story are represented. No one who has not lived extensively among the lower orders of all descriptions, and made himself familiar with their various tempers and dialects, can perceive the full merit of those rapid and characteristic sketches; but it requires only a general knowledge of human nature, to feel that they must be faithful copies from known originals; and to be aware of the extraordinary facility and flexibility of hand which has touched, for instance, with such discriminating shades, the various gradations of the Celtic character, from the savage imperturbability of Dugald Mahony, who stalks grimly about with his battle-axe on his shoulder, without speaking a word to any one,—to the lively unprincipled activity of Callum Beg—the coarse unreflecting hardihood and heroism of Evan Maccombich —and the pride, gallantry, elegance, and ambition of Fergus himself. In the lower class of the Lowland characters, again, the vulgarity of Mrs. Flockhart and of Lieutenant Jinker is perfectly distinct and original; —as well as the puritanism of Gilfillan and Cruickshanks—the atrocity of Mrs. Mucklewrath—and the slow solemnity of Alexander Saunderson. The Baron of Bradwardine, and Bailie Macwheeble, are caricatures no doubt, after the fashion of the caricatures in the novels of Smollett,—or pictures, at the best, of individuals who must always have been unique and

extraordinary: but almost all the other personages in the history are fair representatives of classes that are still existing, or may be remembered at least to have existed, by many whose recollections do not extend quite so far back as to the year 1745. . . .

The gay scenes of the Adventurer's court—the breaking up of his army from Edinburgh—the battle of Preston—and the whole process of his disastrous advance and retreat from the English provinces, are given with the greatest brilliancy and effect,—as well as the scenes of internal disorder and rising disunion that prevailed in his scanty army—the quarrel with Fergus—and the mystical visions by which that devoted chieftain foresees his disastrous fate. The lower scenes again with Mrs. Flockhart, Mrs. Nosebag, Callum-Beg, and the Cumberland peasants, though to some fastidious readers they may appear coarse and disgusting, are painted with a force and a truth to nature, which equally bespeak the powers of the artist, and are incomparably superior to any thing of the sort which has been offered to the public for the last 'sixty years'. There are also various copies of verses scattered through the work, which indicate poetical talents of no ordinary description—though bearing, perhaps still more distinctly than the prose, the traces of considerable carelessness and haste.

The worst part of the book by far is that portion of the first volume which contains the history of the hero's residence in England—and next to it is the laborious, tardy, and obscure explanation of some puzzling occurrences in the story, which the reader would, in general, be much better pleased to be permitted to forget—and which are neither well explained after all, nor at all worth explaining.

There has been much speculation, at least in this quarter of the island, about the authorship of this

singular performance—and certainly it is not easy to conjecture why it is still anonymous.—Judging by internal evidence, to which alone we pretend to have access, we should not scruple to ascribe it to the highest of those authors to whom it has been assigned by the sagacious conjectures of the public;—and this at least we will venture to say, that if it be indeed the work of an author hitherto unknown, Mr. Scott would do well to look to his laurels, and to rouse himself for a sturdier competition than any he has yet had to encounter!

(March, 1817.)

*Tales of my Landlord, collected and arranged by Jedediah Cleishbotham, Schoolmaster and Parish Clerk of the Parish of Gandercleugh.* 4 vols. 12mo. Edinburgh, 1816.

This, we think, is beyond all question a new coinage from the mint which produced *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, and the *Antiquary*:—for though it does not bear the legend and superscription of the Master on the face of the pieces, there is no mistaking either the quality of the metal or the execution of the die—and even the private mark, we doubt not, may be seen plain enough, by those who know how to look for it. It is quite impossible to read ten pages of this work, in short, without feeling that it belongs to the same school with those very remarkable productions; and no one who has any knowledge of nature, or of art, will ever doubt that it is an original. The very identity of the leading characters in the whole set of stories, is a stronger proof, perhaps, that those of the last series are *not* copied from the former, than even the freshness and freedom of the draperies with which they are now invested—or the ease and spirit of the new groups into which they are here combined. No

imitator would have ventured so near his originals, and yet come off so entirely clear of them : and we are only the more assured that the old acquaintances we continually recognize in these volumes are really the persons they pretend to be, and no false mimics, that we recollect so perfectly to have seen them before —or at least to have been familiar with some of their near relations !

We have often been astonished at the quantity of talent—of invention, observation, and knowledge of character, as well as of spirited and graceful composition, that may be found in those works of fiction in our language, which are generally regarded as among the lower productions of our literature,—upon which no great pains is understood to be bestowed, and which are seldom regarded as titles to a permanent reputation. If Novels, however, are not fated to last as long as Epic poems, they are at least a great deal more popular in their season ; and, slight as their structure, and imperfect as their finishing may often be thought in comparison, we have no hesitation in saying, that the better specimens of the art are incomparably more entertaining, and considerably more instructive. The great objection to them, indeed, is, that they are too entertaining—and are so pleasant in the reading, as to be apt to produce a disrelish for other kinds of reading, which may be more necessary, and can in no way be made so agreeable. Neither science nor authentic history, nor political nor professional instruction, can be rightly conveyed, we fear, in a pleasant tale ; and, therefore, all those things are in danger of appearing dull and uninteresting to the votaries of these more seductive studies. Among the most popular of these popular productions that have appeared in our times, we must rank the works to which we have just alluded ; and

we do not hesitate to say, that they are well entitled to that distinction. They are, indeed, in many respects, very extraordinary performances—though in nothing more extraordinary than in having remained so long unclaimed. There is no name, we think, in our literature, to which they would not add lustre —and lustre, too, of a very enviable kind; for they not only show great talent, but infinite good sense and good nature,—a more vigorous and wide-reaching intellect than is often displayed in novels, and a more powerful fancy, and a deeper sympathy with various passion, than is often combined with such strength of understanding.

The author, whoever he is, has a truly graphic and creative power in the invention and delineation of characters—which he sketches with an ease, and colours with a brilliancy, and scatters about with a profusion, which reminds us of Shakespeare himself. Yet with all this force and felicity in the representation of living agents, he has the eye of a poet for all the striking aspects of external nature; and usually contrives, both in his scenery and in the groups with which it is enlivened, to combine the picturesque with the natural, with a grace that has rarely been attained by artists so copious and rapid. His narrative, in this way, is kept constantly full of life, variety, and colour; and is so interspersed with glowing descriptions, and lively allusions, and flying traits of sagacity and pathos, as not only to keep our attention continually awake, but to afford a pleasing exercise to most of our other faculties. The prevailing tone is very gay and pleasant; but the author's most remarkable, and, perhaps, his most delightful talent, is that of representing kindness of heart in union with lightness of spirits and great simplicity of character, and of blending the expression of warm

and generous and exalted affections with scenes and persons that are in themselves both lowly and ludicrous. This gift he shares with his illustrious countryman Burns,—as he does many of the other qualities we have mentioned with another living poet—who is only inferior, perhaps, in that to which we have last alluded. It is very honourable, indeed, we think, both to the author and to the readers among whom he is so extremely popular, that the great interest of his pieces is for the most part a Moral interest—that the concern we take in his favourite characters is less on account of their adventures than of their amiableness—and that the great charm of his works is derived from the kindness of heart, the capacity of generous emotions, and the lights of native taste which he ascribes, so lavishly, and at the same time with such an air of truth and familiarity, even to the humblest of these favourites. With all his relish for the ridiculous, accordingly, there is no tone of misanthropy, or even of sarcasm, in his representations; but, on the contrary, a great indulgence and relenting even towards those who are to be the objects of our disapprobation. There is no keen or cold-blooded satire—no bitterness of heart, or fierceness of resentment, in any part of his writings. His love of ridicule is little else than a love of mirth; and savours throughout of the joyous temperament in which it appears to have its origin; while the buoyancy of a raised and poetical imagination lifts him continually above the region of mere jollity and good humour, to which a taste, by no means nice or fastidious, might otherwise be in danger of sinking him. He is evidently a person of a very sociable and liberal spirit—with great habits of observation—who has ranged pretty extensively through the varieties of human life and character, and mingled with them all, not only with

intelligent familiarity, but with a free and natural sympathy for all the diversities of their tastes, pleasures, and pursuits—one who has kept his heart as well as his eyes open to all that has offered itself to engage them; and learned indulgence for human faults and follies, not only from finding kindred faults in their most intolerant censors, but also for the sake of the virtues by which they are often redeemed, and the sufferings by which they have still oftener been chastised. The temper of his writings, in short, is precisely the reverse of those of our Laureates and Lakers, who, being themselves the most whimsical of mortals, make it a conscience to loathe and abhor all with whom they happen to disagree; and labour to promote mutual animosity and all manner of uncharitableness among mankind; by referring every supposed error of taste, or peculiarity of opinion, to some hateful corruption of the heart and understanding.

With all the indulgence, however, which we so justly ascribe to him, we are far from complaining of the writer before us for being too neutral and undecided on the great subjects which are most apt to engender excessive zeal and intolerance—and we are almost as far from agreeing with him as to most of those subjects. In politics it is sufficiently manifest that he is a decided Tory—and, we are afraid, something of a latitudinarian both in morals and religion. He is very apt at least to make a mock of all enthusiasm for liberty or faith—and not only gives a decided preference to the social over the austerer virtues—but seldom expresses any warm or hearty admiration, except for those graceful and gentleman-like principles, which can generally be acted upon with a gay countenance—and do not imply any great effort of self-denial, or any deep sense of the rights of others, or

the helplessness and humility of our common nature. Unless we misconstrue very grossly the indications in these volumes, the author thinks no time so happy as those in which an indulgent monarch awards a reasonable portion of liberty to grateful subjects, who do not call in question his right either to give or to withhold it—in which a dignified and decent hierarchy receives the homage of their submissive and uninquiring flocks—and a gallant nobility redeems the venial immoralities of their gayer hours, by brave and honourable conduct towards each other, and spontaneous kindness to vassals, in whom they recognize no independent rights, and not many features of a common nature.

It is very remarkable, however, that, with propensities thus decidedly aristocratical, the ingenious author has succeeded by far the best in the representation of rustic and homely characters; and not in the ludicrous or contemptuous representation of them—but by making them at once more natural and more interesting than they had ever been made before in any work of fiction; by showing them, not as clowns to be laughed at—or wretches to be pitied and despised—but as human creatures, with as many pleasures and fewer cares than their superiors—with affections not only as strong, but often as delicate as those whose language is smoother—and with a vein of humour, a force of sagacity, and very frequently an elevation of fancy, as high and as natural as can be met with among more cultivated beings. The great merit of all these delineations is their admirable truth and fidelity—the whole manner and cast of the characters being accurately moulded on their condition—and the finer attributes that are ascribed to them so blended and harmonized with the native rudeness and simplicity of their life and occupations,

that they are made interesting and even noble beings, without the least particle of foppery or exaggeration, and delight and amuse us, without trespassing at all on the province of pastoral or romance.

Next to these, we think, he has found his happiest subjects, or at least displayed his greatest powers, in the delineation of the grand and gloomy aspects of nature, and of the dark and fierce passions of the heart. The natural gaiety of his temper does not indeed allow him to dwell long on such themes; but the sketches he occasionally introduces are executed with admirable force and spirit—and give a strong impression both of the vigour of his imagination and the variety of his talent. It is only in the third rank that we would place his pictures of chivalry and chivalrous character—his traits of gallantry, nobleness, and honour—and that bewitching combination of gay and gentle manners, with generosity, candour, and courage, which has long been familiar enough to readers and writers of novels, but had never before been represented with such an air of truth, and so much ease and happiness of execution.

Among his faults and failures, we must give the first place to his descriptions of virtuous young ladies —and his representations of the ordinary business of courtship and conversation in polished life. We admit that those things, as they are commonly conducted in real life, are apt to be a little insipid to a mere critical spectator; and that while they consequently require more heightening than strange adventures or grotesque persons, they admit less of exaggeration or ambitious ornament: yet we cannot think it necessary that they should be altogether so tame and mawkish as we generally find them in the hands of this spirited writer—whose powers really seem to require some stronger stimulus to bring them into action,

than can be supplied by the flat realities of a peaceful and ordinary existence. His love of the ludicrous, it must also be observed, often betrays him into forced and vulgar exaggerations, and into the repetition of common and paltry stories,—though it is but fair to add, that he does not detain us long with them, and makes amends by the copiousness of his assortment for the indifferent quality of some of the specimens. It is another consequence of this extreme abundance in which he revels and riots, and of the fertility of the imagination from which it is supplied, that he is at all times a little apt to overdo even those things which he does best. His most striking and highly coloured characters appear rather too often, and go on rather too long. It is astonishing, indeed, with what spirit they are supported, and how fresh and animated they are to the very last; but still there is something too much of them,—and they would be more waited for and welcomed, if they were not quite so lavish of their presence.—It was reserved for Shakespeare alone, to leave all his characters as new and unworn as he found them, and to carry Falstaff through the business of three several plays, and leave us as greedy of his sayings as at the moment of his first introduction. It is no light praise to the author before us, that he has sometimes reminded us of this, as well as other inimitable excellences in that most gifted of all inventors.

To complete this hasty and unpremeditated sketch of his general characteristics, we must add that he is above all things national and Scottish—and never seems to feel the powers of a Giant, except when he touches his native soil. His countrymen alone, therefore, can have a full sense of his merits, or a perfect relish of his excellences;—and those only, indeed, of them, who have mingled, as he has done, pretty freely

with the lower orders, and made themselves familiar not only with their language, but with the habits and traits of character, of which it then only becomes expressive. It is one thing to understand the meaning of words, as they are explained by other words in a glossary, and another to know their value, as expressive of certain feelings and humours in the speakers to whom they are native, and as signs both of temper and condition among those who are familiar with their import.

We must content ourselves, we fear, with this hasty and superficial sketch of the general character of this author's performances, in the place of a more detailed examination of those which he has given to the public since we first announced him as the author of *Waverley*. The time for noticing his two intermediate works has been permitted to go by so far, that it would probably be difficult to recall the public attention to them with any effect ; and, at all events, impossible to affect, by any observations of ours, the judgement which has been passed upon them, with very little assistance, we must say, from professed critics, by the mass of their intelligent readers,—by whom, indeed, we have no doubt that they are, by this time, as well known, and as correctly estimated, as if they had been indebted to us for their first impressions on the subject. For our own parts we must confess, that *Waverley* still has to us all the fascination of a first love ! and that we cannot help thinking, that the greatness of the public transactions in which that story was involved, as well as the wildness and picturesque graces of its Highland scenery and characters, have invested it with a charm, to which the more familiar attractions of the other pieces have not quite come up. In this, perhaps, our opinion differs from that of better judges ; but we cannot help

suspecting, that the latter publications are most admired by many, at least in the southern part of the island, only because they are more easily and perfectly understood, in consequence of the training which had been gone through in the perusal of the former. But, however that be, we are far enough from denying that the two succeeding works are performances of extraordinary merit,—and are willing even to admit that they show quite as much power and genius in the author—though, to our taste at least, the subjects are less happily selected.

Dandie Dinmont is, beyond all question, we think, the best rustic portrait that has ever yet been exhibited to the public—the most honourable to rustics, and the most creditable to the heart, as well as the genius of the artist—the truest to nature—the most interesting and the most complete in all its lineaments. —Meg Merrilies belongs more to the department of poetry. She is most akin to the witches of *Macbeth*, with some traits of the ancient Sybil engrafted on the coarser stock of a Gipsy of the last century. Though not absolutely in nature, however, she must be allowed to be a very imposing and emphatic personage ; and to be mingled, both with the business and the scenery of the piece, with the greatest possible skill and effect. —Pleydell is a harsh caricature ; and Dirk Hatteraick a vulgar bandit of the German school. The lovers, too, are rather more faultless and more insipid than usual,—and all the genteel persons, indeed, not a little fatiguing. Yet there are many passages of great merit of a gentler and less obtrusive character. The grief of old Ellangowan for the loss of his child, and the picture of his own dotage and death, are very touching and natural ; while the many descriptions of the coast scenery, and of the various localities of the story, are given with a freedom, force, and effect,

that bring every feature before our eyes, and impress us with an irresistible conviction of their reality.

*The Antiquary* is, perhaps, on the whole, less interesting,—though there are touches in it equal, if not superior, to anything that occurs in either of the other works. The adventure of the tide and night storm under the cliffs, we do not hesitate to pronounce the very best description we ever met with—in verse or in prose, in ancient or in modern writing. Old Edie is of the family of Meg Merrilies—a younger brother, we confess, with less terror and energy, and more taste and gaiety, but equally a poetical embellishment of a familiar character; and yet resting enough on the great points of nature, to be blended without extravagance in the transactions of beings so perfectly natural and thoroughly alive that no suspicion can be entertained of *their* reality. The Antiquary himself is the great blemish of the work—at least in so far as he is an Antiquary;—though we must say for him, that, unlike most oddities, he wearies us most at first; and is so managed, as to turn out both more interesting and more amusing than we had any reason to expect. The low characters in this book are not always worth drawing; but they are exquisitely finished; and prove the extent and accuracy of the author's acquaintance with human life and human nature.—The family of the fisherman is an exquisite group throughout; and, at the scene of the funeral, in the highest degree striking and pathetic. Dousterswivel is as wearisome as the genuine Spurzheim himself: and the tragic story of the Lord is, on the whole, a miscarriage; though interspersed with passages of great force and energy. The *dénouement*, which connects it with the active hero of the piece, is altogether forced and unnatural.—We come now, at once, to the work immediately before us.

*The Tales of My Landlord*, though they fill four volumes, are, as yet, but two in number; the one being three times as long, and ten times as interesting as the other. The introduction, from which the general title is derived, is as foolish and clumsy as may be; and is another instance of that occasional imbecility, or self-willed caprice, which every now and then leads this author, before he gets afloat on the full stream of his narration, into absurdities which excite the astonishment of the least gifted of his readers. This whole prologue of *My Landlord*, which is vulgar in the conception, trite and lame in the execution, and utterly out of harmony with the stories to which it is prefixed, should be entirely retrenched in the future editions; and the two novels, which have as little connexion with each other as with this ill-fancied prelude, given separately to the world, each under its own denomination.

The first, which is comprised in one volume, is called *The Black Dwarf*—and is, in every respect, the least considerable of the family—though very plainly of the legitimate race—and possessing merits, which, in any other company, would have entitled it to no slight distinction. The Dwarf himself is a little too much like the hero of a fairy tale; and the structure and contrivance of the story, in general, would bear no small affinity to that meritorious and edifying class of compositions, was it not for the nature of the details, and the quality of the other persons to whom they relate—who are as real, intelligible, and tangible beings as those with whom we are made familiar in the course of the author's former productions. Indeed they are very apparently the same sort of people, and come here before us again with all the recommendations of old acquaintance. . . .

The other and more considerable story, which fills

the three remaining volumes of this publication, is entitled, though with no great regard even to its fictitious origin, *Old Mortality*; for, at most, it should only have been called the tale or story of Old Mortality —being supposed to be collected from the information of a singular person who is said at one time to have been known by that strange appellation. The *redacteur* of his interesting traditions is here supposed to be a village schoolmaster; and though his introduction brings us again in contact with My Landlord and his parish clerk, we could have almost forgiven that unlucky fiction, if it had often presented us in company with sketches as graceful as we find in the following passage, of the haunts and habits of this singular personage. After mentioning that there was, on the steep and heathy banks of a lonely rivulet, a deserted burying-ground to which he used frequently to turn his walks in the evening, the gentle pedagogue proceeds :

'One summer evening as, in a stroll,' &c.[1]

The scene of the story thus strikingly introduced is laid—in Scotland of course—in those disastrous times which immediately preceded the Revolution of 1688; and exhibits a lively picture, both of the general state of manners at that period, and of the conduct and temper and principles of the two great parties in politics and religion that were then engaged in unequal and rancorous hostility. There are no times certainly, within the reach of authentic history, on which it is more painful to look back—which show a government more base and tyrannical, or a people more helpless and miserable : and though all pictures of the greater passions are full of interest, and a lively representation of strong and enthusiastic emotions

[1 The quotation ends with the words 'the popular appellation of Old Mortality'.]

never fails to be deeply attractive, the piece would have been too full of distress and humiliation, if it had been chiefly engaged with the course of public events, or the record of public feelings. So sad a subject would not have suited many readers—and the author, we suspect, less than any of them. Accordingly, in this, as in his other works, he has made use of the historical events which came in his way, rather to develop the characters, and bring out the peculiarities of the individuals whose adventures he relates, than for any purpose of political information; and makes us present to the times in which he has placed them, less by his direct notices of the great transactions by which they were distinguished, than by his casual intimations of their effects on private persons, and by the very contrast which their temper and occupations often appear to furnish to the colour of the national story. Nothing, indeed, in this respect is more delusive, or at least more woefully imperfect, than the suggestions of authentic history, as it is generally or rather universally written—and nothing more exaggerated than the impressions it conveys of the actual state and condition of those who live in its most agitated periods. The great public events of which alone it takes cognizance have but little direct influence upon the body of the people; and do not, in general, form the principal business, or happiness or misery even of those who are in some measure concerned in them. Even in the worst and most disastrous times—in periods of civil war and revolution, and public discord and oppression, a great part of the time of a great part of the people is still spent in making love and money—in social amusement or professional industry—in schemes for worldly advancement or personal distinction, just as in periods of general peace and prosperity. Men court and marry

very nearly as much in the one season as in the other; and are as merry at weddings and christenings—as gallant at balls and races—as busy in their studies and counting-houses—eat as heartily, in short, and sleep as sound—prattle with their children as pleasantly—and thin their plantations and scold their servants as zealously, as if their contemporaries were not furnishing materials thus abundantly for the Tragic muse of history. The quiet undercurrent of life, in short, keeps its deep and steady course in its eternal channels, unaffected, or but slightly disturbed, by the storms that agitate its surface; and while long tracts of time, in the history of every country, seem, to the distant student of its annals, to be darkened over with one thick and oppressive cloud of unbroken misery, the greater part of those who have lived through the whole acts of the tragedy will be found to have enjoyed a fair average share of felicity, and to have been much less impressed by the shocking events of their day, than those who know nothing else of it than that such events took place in its course. Few men, in short, are historical characters—and scarcely any man is always, or most usually, performing a public part. The actual happiness of every life depends far more on things that regard it exclusively, than on those political occurrences which are the common concern of society; and though nothing lends such an air, both of reality and importance, to a fictitious narrative, as to connect its persons with events in real history, still it is the imaginary individual himself that excites our chief interest throughout, and we care for the national affairs only in so far as they affect him. In one sense, indeed, this is the true end and the best use of history; for as all public events are important only as they ultimately concern individuals, if the individual selected belong to a large

and comprehensive class, and the events, and their natural operations on him, be justly represented, we shall be enabled, in following out his adventures, to form no bad estimate of their true character and value for all the rest of the community.

The author before us has done all this, we think; and with admirable talent and effect: and if he has not been quite impartial in the management of his historical persons, has contrived, at any rate, to make them contribute largely to the interest of his acknowledged inventions. His view of the effects of great political contentions on private happiness is, however, we have no doubt, substantially true; and that chiefly because it is not exaggerated—because he does not confine himself to show how gentle natures may be roused into heroism, or rougher tempers exasperated into rancour, by public oppression—but turns still more willingly to show with what ludicrous absurdity genuine enthusiasm may be debased, how little the gaiety of the light-hearted and thoughtless may be impaired by the spectacle of public calamity, and how in the midst of national distraction, selfishness will pursue its little game of quiet and cunning speculation—and gentler affections find time to multiply and to meet!

It is this, we think, that constitutes the great and peculiar merit of the work before us. It contains an admirable picture of manners and of characters; and exhibits, we think, with great truth and discrimination, the extent and the variety of the shades which the stormy aspect of the political horizon would be likely to throw on such objects. And yet, though exhibiting beyond all doubt the greatest possible talent and originality, we cannot help fancying that we can trace the rudiments of almost all its characters in the very first of the author's publications.—Morton

is but another edition of Waverley—taking a bloody part in political contention, without caring much about the cause, and interchanging high offices of generosity with his political opponents,—Claverhouse has many of the features of the gallant Fergus.—Cuddie Headrigg, of whose merits, by the way, we have given no fair specimen in our extracts, is a Dandie Dinmont of a considerably lower species,—and even the Covenanters and their leaders were shadowed out, though afar off, in the gifted Gilfillan, and mine host of the Candlestick. It is in the picture of these hapless enthusiasts, undoubtedly, that the great merit and the great interest of the work consists.

[Jeffrey reviewed also *Rob Roy* (February, 1818); *Ivanhoe*—with a reference to *The Heart of Midlothian*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, and *The Legend of Montrose* (January, 1820); and *The Fortunes of Nigel*—with a 'long retrospection' on *The Monastery*, *The Abbot*, *Kenilworth*, and *The Pirate* (June, 1822). In his five articles Jeffrey had thus noticed all the Waverley Novels that had yet appeared. He included the five articles, in a condensed form, in the republication.]

# WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

## (November, 1814.)

*The Excursion; being a Portion of the Recluse, a Poem.* By William Wordsworth. 4to, pp. 447. London, 1814 [1].

This will never do! It bears no doubt the stamp of the author's heart and fancy: but unfortunately not half so visibly as that of his peculiar system. His

[1] I have spoken in many places rather too bitterly and confidently of the faults of Mr. Wordsworth's poetry: and forgetting that, even on my own view of them, they were but faults of taste, or venial self-partiality, have sometimes visited them, I fear, with an asperity which should be reserved for objects of moral reprobation. If I were now to deal with the whole question of his poetical merits, though my judgement might not be substantially different, I hope I should repress the greater part of these *vivacités* of expression: and indeed so strong has been my feeling in this way, that, considering how much I have always loved many of the attributes of his genius, and how entirely I respect his character, it did at first occur to me whether it was quite fitting that, in my old age and his, I should include in this publication any of those critiques which may have formerly given pain or offence, to him or his admirers. But when I reflected that the mischief, if there really ever was any, was long ago done, and that I still retain, in substance, the opinions which I should now like to have seen more gently expressed, I felt that to omit all notice of them on the present occasion, might be held to import a retractation which I am as far as possible from intending; or even be represented as a very shabby way of backing out of sentiments which should either be manfully persisted in, or openly renounced, and abandoned as untenable.

I finally resolved, therefore, to reprint my review of *The Excursion*; which contains a pretty full view of my griefs and charges against Mr. Wordsworth; set forth too, I believe, in a more temperate strain than most of my other inculpations,—and of which I think I may now venture to say farther, that if the faults are unsparingly noted, the beauties are not penuriously or grudgingly allowed: but commended to the admiration of the reader with at least as much heartiness and good-will.

But I have also reprinted a short paper on the same author's

former poems were intended to recommend that system, and to bespeak favour for it by their individual merit;—but this, we suspect, must be recommended by the system—and can only expect to succeed where it has been previously established. It is longer, weaker, and tamer, than any of Mr. Wordsworth's other productions; with less boldness of originality, and less even of that extreme simplicity and lowliness of tone which wavered so prettily, in the *Lyrical Ballads*, between silliness and pathos. We have imitations of Cowper, and even of Milton here; engrafted on the natural drawl of the Lakers—and all diluted into harmony by that

*White Doe of Rylstone*—in which there certainly is no praise, or notice of beauties, to set against the very unqualified censures of which it is wholly made up. I have done this, however, not merely because I adhere to these censures, but chiefly because it seemed necessary to bring me fairly to issue with those who may not concur in them. I can easily understand that many whose admiration of the *Excursion*, or the *Lyrical Ballads*, rests substantially on the passages which I too should join in admiring, may view with greater indulgence than I can do the tedious and flat passages with which they are interspersed, and may consequently think my censure of these works a great deal too harsh and uncharitable. Between such persons and me, therefore, there may be no radical difference of opinion, or contrariety as to principles of judgement. But if there be any who actually admire this *White Doe of Rylstone*, or *Peter Bell the Waggoner*, or the *Lamentations of Martha Rae*, or the *Sonnets on the Punishment of Death*, there can be no such ambiguity, or means of reconcilement. Now I have been assured not only that there are such persons, but that almost all those who seek to exalt Mr. Wordsworth as the founder of a new school of poetry, consider these as by far his best and most characteristic productions; and would at once reject from their communion any one who did not acknowledge in them the traces of a high inspiration. Now I wish it to be understood, that when I speak with general intolerance or impatience of the school of Mr. Wordsworth, it is to the school holding these tenets, and applying these tests, that I refer: and I really do not see how I could better explain the grounds of my dissent from their doctrines, than by republishing my remarks on this *White Doe*.

profuse and irrepressible wordiness which deluges all the blank verse of this school of poetry, and lubricates and weakens the whole structure of their style.

Though it fairly fills four hundred and twenty good quarto pages, without note, vignette, or any sort of extraneous assistance, it is stated in the title—with something of an imprudent candour—to be but 'a portion' of a larger work; and in the preface, where an attempt is rather unsuccessfully made to explain the whole design, it is still more rashly disclosed, that it is but '*a part of the second part*, of a *long* and laborious work'—which is to consist of three parts!

What Mr. Wordsworth's ideas of length are, we have no means of accurately judging: but we cannot help suspecting that they are liberal to a degree that will alarm the weakness of most modern readers. As far as we can gather from the preface, the entire poem —or one of them (for we really are not sure whether there is to be one or two), is of a biographical nature; and is to contain the history of the author's mind, and of the origin and progress of his poetical powers, up to the period when they were sufficiently matured to qualify him for the great work on which he has been so long employed. Now, the quarto before us contains an account of one of his youthful rambles in the vales of Cumberland, and occupies precisely the period of three days! So that, by the use of a very powerful *calculus*, some estimate may be formed of the probable extent of the entire biography.

This small specimen, however, and the statements with which it is prefaced, have been sufficient to set our minds at rest in one particular. The case of Mr. Wordsworth, we perceive, is now manifestly hopeless; and we give him up as altogether incurable, and beyond the power of criticism. We cannot, indeed, altogether omit taking precautions now and then

against the spreading of the malady; but for himself, though we shall watch the progress of his symptoms as a matter of professional curiosity and instruction, we really think it right not to harass him any longer with nauseous remedies,—but rather to throw in cordials and lenitives, and wait in patience for the natural termination of the disorder. In order to justify this desertion of our patient, however, it is proper to state why we despair of the success of a more active practice.

A man who has been for twenty years at work on such matter as is now before us, and who comes complacently forward with a whole quarto of it, after all the admonitions he has received, cannot reasonably be expected to 'change his hand, or check his pride', upon the suggestion of far weightier monitors than we can pretend to be. Inveterate habit must now have given a kind of sanctity to the errors of early taste; and the very powers of which we lament the perversion have probably become incapable of any other application. The very quantity, too, that he has written, and is at this moment working up for publication upon the old pattern, makes it almost hopeless to look for any change of it. All this is so much capital already sunk in the concern; which must be sacrificed if that be abandoned: and no man likes to give up for lost the time and talent and labour which he has embodied in any permanent production. We were not previously aware of these obstacles to Mr. Wordsworth's conversion; and, considering the peculiarities of his former writings merely as the result of certain wanton and capricious experiments on public taste and indulgence, conceived it to be our duty to discourage their repetition by all the means in our power. We now see clearly, however, how the case stands; and, making up our minds,

though with the most sincere pain and reluctance, to consider him as finally lost to the good cause of poetry, shall endeavour to be thankful for the occasional gleams of tenderness and beauty which the natural force of his imagination and affections must still shed over all his productions,—and to which we shall ever turn with delight, in spite of the affectation and mysticism and prolixity with which they are so abundantly contrasted.

Long habits of seclusion, and an excessive ambition of originality, can alone account for the disproportion which seems to exist between this author's taste and his genius; or for the devotion with which he has sacrificed so many precious gifts at the shrine of those paltry idols which he has set up for himself among his lakes and his mountains. Solitary musings, amidst such scenes, might no doubt be expected to nurse up the mind to the majesty of poetical conception (though it is remarkable that all the greater poets lived, or had lived, in the full current of society): but the collision of equal minds—the admonition of prevailing impressions—seems necessary to reduce its redundancies, and repress that tendency to extravagance or puerility, into which the self-indulgence and self-admiration of genius is so apt to be betrayed, when it is allowed to wanton, without awe or restraint, in the triumph and delight of its own intoxication. That its flights should be graceful and glorious in the eyes of men, it seems almost to be necessary that they should be made in the consciousness that men's eyes are to behold them,—and that the inward transport and vigour by which they are inspired should be tempered by an occasional reference to what will be thought of them by those ultimate dispensers of glory. An habitual and general knowledge of the few settled and permanent maxims, which form the canon

of general taste in all large and polished societies—a certain tact, which informs us at once that many things, which we still love and are moved by in secret, must necessarily be despised as childish, or derided as absurd, in all such societies—though it will not stand in the place of genius, seems necessary to the success of its exertions; and though it will never enable any one to produce the higher beauties of art, can alone secure the talent which does produce them from errors that must render it useless. Those who have most of the talent, however, commonly acquire this knowledge with the greatest facility;—and if Mr. Wordsworth, instead of confining himself almost entirely to the society of the dalesmen and cottagers, and little children, who form the subjects of his book, had condescended to mingle a little more with the people that were to read and judge of it, we cannot help thinking that its texture might have been considerably improved: at least it appears to us to be absolutely impossible, that any one who had lived or mixed familiarly with men of literature and ordinary judgement in poetry (of course we exclude the co-adjutors and disciples of his own school), could ever have fallen into such gross faults, or so long mistaken them for beauties. His first essays we looked upon in a good degree as poetical paradoxes,—maintained experimentally, in order to display talent, and court notoriety;—and so maintained, with no more serious belief in their truth, than is usually generated by an ingenious and animated defence of other paradoxes. But when we find that he has been for twenty years exclusively employed upon articles of this very fabric, and that he has still enough of raw material on hand to keep him so employed for twenty years to come, we cannot refuse him the justice of believing that he is a sincere convert to his own system, and must

ascribe the peculiarities of his composition, not to any transient affectation, or accidental caprice of imagination, but to a settled perversity of taste or understanding, which has been fostered, if not altogether created, by the circumstances to which we have alluded.

The volume before us, if we were to describe it very shortly, we should characterize as a tissue of moral and devotional ravings, in which innumerable changes are rung upon a few very simple and familiar ideas: but with such an accompaniment of long words, long sentences, and unwieldy phrases—and such a hubbub of strained raptures and fantastical sublimities, that it is often difficult for the most skilful and attentive student to obtain a glimpse of the author's meaning—and altogether impossible for an ordinary reader to conjecture what he is about. Moral and religious enthusiasm, though undoubtedly poetical emotions, are at the same time but dangerous inspirers of poetry; nothing being so apt to run into interminable dullness or mellifluous extravagance, without giving the unfortunate author the slightest intimation of his danger. His laudable zeal for the efficacy of his preachments, he very naturally mistakes for the ardour of poetical inspiration; and, while dealing out the high words and glowing phrases which are so readily supplied by themes of this description, can scarcely avoid believing that he is eminenlty original and impressive. All sorts of commonplace notions and expressions are sanctified in his eyes, by the sublime ends for which they are employed; and the mystical verbiage of the Methodist pulpit is repeated, till the speaker entertains no doubt that he is the chosen organ of divine truth and persuasion. But if such be the common hazards of seeking inspiration from those potent fountains, it may easily

be conceived what chance Mr. Wordsworth had of escaping their enchantment,—with his natural propensities to wordiness, and his unlucky habit of debasing pathos with vulgarity. The fact accordingly is, that in this production he is more obscure than a Pindaric poet of the seventeenth century ; and more verbose ' than even himself of yore ' ; while the wilfulness with which he persists in choosing his examples of intellectual dignity and tenderness exclusively from the lowest ranks of society, will be sufficiently apparent, from the circumstance of his having thought fit to make his chief prolocutor in this poetical dialogue, and chief advocate of Providence and virtue, *an old Scotch Pedlar*—retired indeed from business—but still rambling about in his former haunts, and gossiping among his old customers, without his pack on his shoulders. The other persons of the drama are a retired military chaplain, who has grown half an atheist and half a misanthrope—the wife of an unprosperous weaver —a servant girl with her natural child—a parish pauper, and one or two other personages of equal rank and dignity.

The character of the work is decidedly didactic ; and more than nine tenths of it are occupied with a species of dialogue, or rather a series of long sermons or harangues, which pass between the pedlar, the author, the old chaplain, and a worthy vicar, who entertains the whole party at dinner on the last day of their excursion. The incidents which occur in the course of it are as few and trifling as can well be imagined ;—and those which the different speakers narrate in the course of their discourses, are introduced rather to illustrate their arguments or opinions, than for any interest they are supposed to possess of their own.—The doctrine which the work is intended

to enforce, we are by no means certain that we have discovered. In so far as we can collect, however, it seems to be neither more nor less than the old familiar one, that a firm belief in the providence of a wise and beneficent Being must be our great stay and support under all afflictions and perplexities upon earth—and that there are indications of His power and goodness in all the aspects of the visible universe, whether living or inanimate—every part of which should therefore be regarded with love and reverence, as exponents of those great attributes. We can testify, at least, that these salutary and important truths are inculcated at far greater length, and with more repetitions, than in any ten volumes of sermons that we ever perused. It is also maintained, with equal conciseness and originality, that there is frequently much good sense, as well as much enjoyment, in the humbler conditions of life; and that, in spite of great vices and abuses, there is a reasonable allowance both of happiness and goodness in society at large. If there be any deeper or more recondite doctrines in Mr. Wordsworth's book, we must confess that they have escaped us;—and, convinced as we are of the truth and soundness of those to which we have alluded, we cannot help thinking that they might have been better enforced with less parade and prolixity. His effusions on what may be called the physiognomy of external nature, or its moral and theological expression, are eminently fantastic, obscure, and affected.—It is quite time, however, that we should give the reader a more particular account of this singular performance.

It opens with a picture of the author toiling across a bare common in a hot summer day, and reaching at last a ruined hut surrounded with tall trees, where he meets by appointment with a hale old man, with an iron-pointed staff lying beside him. Then follows a

retrospective account of their first acquaintance—formed, it seems, when the author was at a village school; and his aged friend occupied 'one room—the fifth part of a house' in the neighbourhood. After this, we have the history of this reverend person at no small length. He was born, we are happy to find, in Scotland—among the hills of Athol; and his mother, after his father's death, married the parish schoolmaster—so that he was taught his letters betimes: but then, as it is here set forth with much solemnity,

> From his sixth year, the boy of whom I speak,
> In summer, tended cattle on the hills!

And again, a few pages after, that there may be no risk of mistake as to a point of such essential importance—

> From early childhood, even, as hath been said,
> From his *sixth year*, he had been sent abroad,
> *In summer*—to tend herds! Such was his task!

In the course of this occupation, it is next recorded, that he acquired such a taste for rural scenery and open air, that when he was sent to teach a school in a neighbouring village, he found it 'a misery to him'; and determined to embrace the more romantic occupation of a Pedlar—or, as Mr. Wordsworth more musically expresses it,

> A vagrant merchant, bent beneath his load;

—and in the course of his peregrinations had acquired a very large acquaintance, which, after he had given up dealing, he frequently took a summer ramble to visit.

The author, on coming up to this interesting personage, finds him sitting with his eyes half shut;—

and, not being quite sure whether he is asleep or awake, stands ' some minutes' space ' in silence beside him. ' At length,' says he, with his own delightful simplicity—

> At length I hail'd him—*seeing that his hat*
> *Was moist* with water-drops, as if the brim
> Had newly scoop'd a running stream !—
> ——————' 'Tis ', said I, ' a burning day !
> My lips are parch'd with thirst ;—but you, I guess,
> Have somewhere found relief.'

Upon this, the benevolent old man points him out, not a running stream, but a well in a corner, to which the author repairs ; and, after minutely describing its situation, beyond a broken wall, and between two alders that ' grew in a cold, damp nook ', he thus faithfully chronicles the process of his return :—

> My thirst I slak'd ; and from the cheerless spot
> Withdrawing, straightway to the shade return'd,
> Where sate the old man on the cottage bench.

The Pedlar then gives an account of the last inhabitants of the deserted cottage beside them. These were, a good industrious weaver and his wife and children. They were very happy for a while, till sickness and want of work came upon them ; and then the father enlisted as a soldier, and the wife pined in that lonely cottage—growing every year more careless and desponding, as her anxiety and fears for her absent husband, of whom no tidings ever reached her, accumulated. Her children died, and left her cheerless and alone ; and at last she died also ; and the cottage fell to decay. We must say, that there is very considerable pathos in the telling of this simple story ; and that they who can get over the repugnance excited by the triteness of its incidents, and

the lowness of its objects, will not fail to be struck with the author's knowledge of the human heart, and the power he possesses of stirring up its deepest and gentlest sympathies. His prolixity, indeed, it is not so easy to get over. This little story fills about twenty-five quarto pages; and abounds, of course, with mawkish sentiment, and details of preposterous minuteness. When the tale is told, the travellers take their staves, and end their first day's journey, without further adventure, at a little inn.

The Second Book sets them forward betimes in the morning; they pass by a Village Wake; and as they approach a more solitary part of the mountains, the old man tells the author that he is taking him to see an old friend of his, who had formerly been chaplain to a Highland regiment—had lost a beloved wife—been roused from his dejection by the first enthusiasm of the French Revolution—had emigrated, on its miscarriage, to America—and returned disgusted to hide himself in the retreat to which they were now ascending. That retreat is then most tediously described—a smooth green valley in the heart of the mountain, without trees, and with only one dwelling. Just as they get sight of it from the ridge above, they see a funeral train proceeding from the solitary abode, and hurry on with some apprehension for the fate of the amiable misanthrope—whom they find, however, in very tolerable condition at the door, and learn that the funeral was that of an aged pauper who had been boarded out by the parish in that cheap farm-house, and had died in consequence of long exposure to heavy rain. The old chaplain, or, as Mr. Wordsworth is pleased to call him, the Solitary, tells this dull story at prodigious length; and after giving an inflated description of an effect of mountain mists in the evening sun, treats his visitors with a rustic

dinner—and they walk out to the fields at the close of the second book.

The Third makes no progress in the excursion. It is entirely filled with moral and religious conversation and debate, and with a more ample detail of the Solitary's past life than had been given in the sketch of his friend. The conversation is, in our judgement, exceedingly dull and mystical; and the Solitary's confessions insufferably diffuse. Yet there is occasionally very considerable force of writing and tenderness of sentiment in this part of the work.

The Fourth Book is also filled with dialogues, ethical and theological; and, with the exception of some brilliant and forcible expressions here and there, consists of an exposition of truisms, more cloudy, wordy, and inconceivably prolix, than anything we ever met with.

In the beginning of the Fifth Book, they leave the solitary valley, taking its pensive inhabitant along with them, and stray on to where the landscape sinks down into milder features, till they arrive at a church, which stands on a moderate elevation in the centre of a wide and fertile vale. Here they meditate for a while among the monuments, till the Vicar comes out and joins them; and, recognizing the Pedlar for an old acquaintance, mixes graciously in the conversation, which proceeds in a very edifying manner till the close of the book.

The Sixth contains a choice obituary, or characteristic account, of several of the persons who lie buried before this group of moralizers;—an unsuccessful lover, who had found consolation in natural history —a miner, who worked on for twenty years, in despite of universal ridicule, and at last found the vein he had expected—two political enemies reconciled in old age to each other—an old female miser—a seduced

damsel—and two widowers, one who had devoted himself to the education of his daughters, and one who had preferred marrying a prudent middle-aged woman to take care of them.

In the beginning of the Eighth Book, the worthy Vicar expresses, in the words of Mr. Wordsworth's own epitome, 'his apprehensions that he had detained his auditors too long—invites them to his house—Solitary, disinclined to comply, rallies the Wanderer, and somewhat playfully draws a comparison between his itinerant profession and that of a knight-errant—which leads to the Wanderer giving an account of changes in the country, from the Manufacturing spirit—Its favourable effects—The other side of the picture,' &c. &c. After these very poetical themes are exhausted, they all go into the house, where they are introduced to the Vicar's wife and daughter; and while they sit chatting in the parlour over a family dinner, his son and one of his companions come in with a fine dish of trouts piled on a blue slate; and after being caressed by the company, are sent to dinner in the nursery.—This ends the eighth book.

The Ninth and last is chiefly occupied with a mystical discourse of the Pedlar; who maintains, that the whole universe is animated by an active principle, the noblest seat of which is in the human soul; and moreover, that the final end of old age is to train and enable us

> To hear the mighty stream of *Tendency*
> Uttering, for elevation of our thought,
> A clear sonorous voice, inaudible
> To the vast multitude whose doom it is
> To run the giddy round of vain delight—

with other matters as luminous and emphatic. The hostess at length breaks off the harangue, by propos-

ing that they should all make a little excursion on the lake,—and they embark accordingly ; and, after navigating for some time along its shores, and drinking tea on a little island, land at last on a remote promontory, from which they see the sun go down,—and listen to a solemn and pious, but rather long prayer from the Vicar. They then walk back to the parsonage door, where the Author and his friend propose to spend the evening ; but the Solitary prefers walking back in the moonshine to his own valley, after promising to take another ramble with them—

> If time, with free consent, be yours to give,
> And season favours.

—And here the publication somewhat abruptly closes.

Our abstract of the story has been so extremely concise, that it is more than usually necessary for us to lay some specimens of the work itself before our readers. Its grand staple, as we have already said, consists of a kind of mystical morality : and the chief characteristics of the style are, that it is prolix, and very frequently unintelligible : and though we are sensible that no great gratification is to be expected from the exhibition of those qualities, yet it is necessary to give our readers a taste of them, both to justify the sentence we have passed, and to satisfy them that it was really beyond our power to present them with any abstract or intelligible account of those long conversations which we have had so much occasion to notice in our brief sketch of its contents.[1] . . .

[1] Jeffrey quotes Book IV, 71–9, 130–7, 146–89, 214–27; then, 'taking a dip nearer the beginning', Book I, 148–61, 227–36, 263–77, 293–300; then IV, 508–39, III, 967–87, II, 410–33, and IV, 402–11. These line references are to the final form of the poem, a comparison of which with Jeffrey's citations will show that the poet did not ignore the critic.]

What we have now quoted will give the reader a notion of the taste and spirit in which this volume is composed: and yet, if it had not contained something a good deal better, we do not know how we should have been justified in troubling him with any account of it. But the truth is that Mr. Wordsworth, with all his perversities, is a person of great powers; and has frequently a force in his moral declamations, and a tenderness in his pathetic narratives, which neither his prolixity nor his affectation can altogether deprive of their effect. We shall venture to give some extracts from the simple tale of the Weaver's solitary cottage.[1] . . .

Besides those more extended passages of interest or beauty, which we have quoted, and omitted to quote, there are scattered up and down the book, and in the midst of its most repulsive portions, a very great number of single lines and images, that sparkle like gems in the desert, and startle us by an intimation of the great poetic powers that lie buried in the rubbish that has been heaped around them. It is difficult to pick up these, after we have once passed them by; but we shall endeavour to light upon one or two. The beneficial effect of intervals of relaxation and pastime on youthful minds is finely

[1 This is followed by 'the story of the old Chaplain' (Book III), which, 'though a little less lowly, is of the same mournful cast, and almost equally destitute of incidents; for Mr. Wordsworth delineates only feelings—and all his adventures are of the heart. The narrative which is given by the sufferer himself is, in our opinion, the most spirited and interesting part of the poem.' Then comes the story of Ellen (Book VI), 'told with great sweetness, pathos, and indulgence, by the Vicar of the parish, by the side of her untimely grave', and containing passages 'among the most touching with which the volume presents us; though there are many in a more lofty and impassioned style'. The quotations in the whole essay extend to well over 600 lines.]

expressed, we think, in a single line, when it is said to be—

Like vernal ground to Sabbath sunshine left.

The following image of the bursting forth of a mountain-spring seems to us also to be conceived with great elegance and beauty.

And a few steps may bring us to the spot,
Where haply crown'd with flow'rets and green herbs,
The mountain Infant to the Sun comes forth,
Like human life from darkness !

The ameliorating effects of song and music on the minds which most delight in them are likewise very poetically expressed.

—— And when the stream
Which overflow'd the soul was pass'd away,
A consciousness remain'd that it had left,
Deposited upon the silent shore
Of memory, images and precious thoughts,
That shall not die, and cannot be destroy'd.

Nor is anything more elegant than the representation of the graceful tranquillity occasionally put on by one of the author's favourites ; who, though gay and airy, in general—

Was graceful, when it pleased him, smooth and still
As the mute swan that floats adown the stream,
Or on the waters of th' unruffled lake
Anchors her placid beauty. Not a leaf
That flutters on the bough more light than he,
And not a flow'r that droops in the green shade
More winningly reserv'd.

Nor are there wanting morsels of a sterner and more majestic beauty ; as when, assuming the weightier

diction of Cowper, he says, in language to which the hearts of all readers of modern history must have responded—

> —— Earth is sick,
> And Heav'n is weary of the hollow words
> Which States and Kingdoms utter when they speak
> Of Truth and Justice.

These examples, we perceive, are not very well chosen—but we have not leisure to improve the selection; and, such as they are, they may serve to give the reader a notion of the sort of merit which we meant to illustrate by their citation. When we look back to them, indeed, and to the other passages which we have now extracted, we feel half inclined to rescind the severe sentence which we passed on the work at the beginning: but when we look into the work itself, we perceive that it cannot be rescinded. Nobody can be more disposed to do justice to the great powers of Mr. Wordsworth than we are; and, from the first time that he came before us, down to the present moment, we have uniformly testified in their favour, and assigned indeed our high sense of their value as the chief ground of the bitterness with which we resented their perversion. That perversion, however, is now far more visible than their original dignity; and while we collect the fragments, it is impossible not to mourn over the ruins from which we are condemned to pick them. If any one should doubt of the existence of such a perversion, or be disposed to dispute about the instances we have hastily brought forward, we would just beg leave to refer him to the general plan and character of the poem now before us. Why should Mr. Wordsworth have made his hero a superannuated Pedlar? What but the most wretched affectation, or provoking perversity of taste, could induce any one to place his

chosen advocate of wisdom and virtue in so absurd and fantastic a condition? Did Mr. Wordsworth really imagine that his favourite doctrines were likely to gain any thing in point of effect or authority, by being put into the mouth of a person accustomed to higgle about tape, or brass sleeve-buttons? Or is it not plain, that, independent of the ridicule and disgust which such a personification must excite in many of his readers, its adoption exposes his work throughout to the charge of revolting incongruity, and utter disregard of probability or nature? For, after he has thus wilfully debased his moral teacher by a low occupation, is there one word that he puts into his mouth, or one sentiment of which he makes him the organ, that has the most remote reference to that occupation? Is there any thing in his learned, abstract, and logical harangues, that savours of the calling that is ascribed to him? Are any of their materials such as a pedlar could possibly have dealt in? Are the manners, the diction, the sentiments, in any the very smallest degree, accommodated to a person in that condition? or are they not eminently and conspicuously such as could not by possibility belong to it? A man who went about selling flannel and pocket-handkerchiefs in this lofty diction, would soon frighten away all his customers; and would infallibly pass either for a madman, or for some learned and affected gentleman, who, in a frolic, had taken up a character which he was peculiarly ill qualified for supporting.

The absurdity in this case, we think, is palpable and glaring: but it is exactly of the same nature with that which infects the whole substance of the work—a puerile ambition of singularity engrafted on an unlucky predilection for truisms; and an affected passion for simplicity and humble life, most awk-

wardly combined with a taste for mystical refinements, and all the gorgeousness of obscure phraseology. His taste for simplicity is evinced by sprinkling up and down his interminable declamations a few descriptions of baby-houses, and of old hats with wet brims; and his amiable partiality for humble life, by assuring us that a wordy rhetorician, who talks about Thebes, and allegorizes all the heathen mythology, was once a pedlar—and making him break in upon his magnificent orations with two or three awkward notices of something that he had seen when selling winter raiment about the country—or of the changes in the state of society, which had almost annihilated his former calling.

## (October, 1815.)

*The White Doe of Rylstone; or the Fate of the Nortons: a Poem.* By William Wordsworth. 4to, pp. 162. London, 1815.

This, we think, has the merit of being the very worst poem we ever saw imprinted in a quarto volume; and though it was scarcely to be expected, we confess, that Mr. Wordsworth, with all his ambition, should so soon have attained to that distinction, the wonder may perhaps be diminished when we state, that it seems to us to consist of a happy union of all the faults, without any of the beauties, which belong to his school of poetry. It is just such a work, in short, as some wicked enemy of that school might be supposed to have devised, on purpose to make it ridiculous; and when we first took it up, we could not help suspecting that some ill-natured critic had actually taken this harsh method of instructing Mr. Wordsworth, by example, in the nature of those errors, against which our precepts had been so often

directed in vain. We had not gone far, however, till we felt intuitively that nothing in the nature of a joke could be so insupportably dull;—and that this must be the work of one who earnestly believed it to be a pattern of pathetic simplicity, and gave it out as such to the admiration of all intelligent readers. In this point of view, the work may be regarded as curious at least, if not in some degree interesting; and, at all events, it must be instructive to be made aware of the excesses into which superior understandings may be betrayed, by long self-indulgence, and the strange extravagances into which they may run, when under the influence of that intoxication which is produced by unrestrained admiration of themselves. This poetical intoxication, indeed, to pursue the figure a little farther, seems capable of assuming as many forms as the vulgar one which arises from wine; and it appears to require as delicate a management to make a man a good poet by the help of the one, as to make him a good companion by means of the other. In both cases, a little mistake as to the dose or the quality of the inspiring fluid may make him absolutely outrageous, or lull him over into the most profound stupidity, instead of brightening up the hidden stores of his genius: and truly we are concerned to say that Mr. Wordsworth seems hitherto to have been unlucky in the choice of his liquor—or of his bottle holder. In some of his odes and ethic exhortations, he was exposed to the public in a state of incoherent rapture and glorious delirium, to which we think we have seen a parallel among the humbler lovers of jollity. In the *Lyrical Ballads* he was exhibited, on the whole, in a vein of very pretty deliration; but in the poem before us, he appears in a state of low and maudlin imbecility, which would not have misbecome Master Silence himself, in the close of

a social day. Whether this unhappy result is to be ascribed to any adulteration of his Castalian cups, or to the unlucky choice of his company over them, we cannot presume to say. It may be that he has dashed his Hippocrene with too large an infusion of lake water, or assisted its operation too exclusively by the study of the ancient historical ballads of 'the north countrie'. That there are palpable imitations of the style and manner of those venerable compositions in the work before us, is indeed undeniable; but it unfortunately happens that while the hobbling versification, the mean diction, and flat stupidity of these models are very exactly copied, and even improved upon, in this imitation, their rude energy, manly simplicity, and occasional felicity of expression, have totally disappeared; and, instead of them, a large allowance of the author's own metaphysical sensibility, and mystical wordiness, is forced into an unnatural combination with the borrowed beauties which have just been mentioned.

The story of the poem, though not capable of furnishing out matter for a quarto volume, might yet have made an interesting ballad; and, in the hands of Mr. Scott or Lord Byron, would probably have supplied many images to be loved, and descriptions to be remembered. The incidents arise out of the short-lived Catholic insurrection of the Northern counties in the reign of Elizabeth, which was supposed to be connected with the project of marrying the Queen of Scots to the Duke of Norfolk; and terminated in the ruin of the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland, by whom it was chiefly abetted. Among the victims of this rash enterprise was Richard Norton of Rylstone, who comes to the array with a splendid banner, at the head of eight tall sons, but against the will and advice of a ninth, who, though

he refused to join the host, yet follows unarmed in its rear, out of anxiety for the fate of his family; and when the father and his gallant progeny are made prisoners, and led to execution at York, recovers the fatal banner, and is slain by a party of the Queen's horse near Bolton Priory, in which place he had been ordered to deposit it by the dying voice of his father. The stately halls and pleasant bowers of Rylstone are then wasted, and fall into desolation; while the heroic daughter, and only survivor of the house, is sheltered among its faithful retainers, and wanders about for many years in its neighbourhood, accompanied by a beautiful white doe, which had formerly been a pet in the family; and continues, long after the death of this sad survivor, to repair every Sunday to the churchyard of Bolton Priory, and there to feed and wander among the graves, to the wonder and delight of the rustic congregation that came there to worship.

This, we think, is a pretty subject for a ballad; and, in the author's better day, might have made a lyrical one of considerable interest. Let us see, however, how he deals with it, since he has bethought him of publishing in quarto.

The First Canto merely contains the description of the Doe coming into the churchyard on Sunday, and of the congregation wondering at her. She is described as being as white as a lily—or the moon—or a ship in the sunshine; and this is the style in which Mr. Wordsworth marvels and moralizes about her through ten quarto pages.

> What harmonious, pensive changes,
> Wait upon her as she ranges
> Round and through this Pile of State,
> Overthrown and desolate!

The presence of this wand'ring Doe
Fills many a damp obscure recess
With lustre of a saintly show;
And, re-appearing, she no less
To the open day gives blessedness.

The mothers point out this pretty creature to their children; and tell them in sweet nursery phrases—

Now you who have seen the famous Doe!
From Rylstone she hath found her way
Over the hills this Sabbath-day;
Her work, whate'er it be, is done,
And she will depart when we are gone.

The poet knows why she comes there, and thinks the people may know it too: but some of them think she is a new incarnation of some of the illustrious dead that lie buried around them; and one, who it seems is an Oxford scholar, conjectures that she may be the fairy who instructed Lord Clifford in Astrology! an ingenious fancy, which the poet thus gently reproveth—

Ah, pensive scholar! think not so!
But look again at the radiant doe!

and then closes the Canto with this natural and luminous apostrophe to his harp—

But, harp! thy murmurs may not cease,—
Thou hast breeze-like visitings;
For a Spirit with angel-wings
Hath touch'd thee, and a Spirit's hand:
A voice is with us—a command
To chant, in *strains of heavenly glory*,
A tale of tears, a mortal story!

The Second Canto is more full of business; and affords us more insight into the author's manner of conducting a story. The opening, however, which goes

back to the bright and original conception of the harp, is not quite so intelligible as might have been desired.

> The harp in lowliness obey'd :
> And first we sang of the greenwood shade ;
> And a solitary Maid !
> Beginning, *where the song must end*,
> With her, and with her sylvan Friend ;
> The friend who stood before her sight,
> Her only unextinguish'd light,—
> Her last companion in a dearth
> Of love, upon a hopeless earth.

This solitary maid, we are then told, had wrought, at the request of her father, ' an unblessed work '—

> A Banner—one that did fulfil
> Too perfectly his headstrong will :
> For on this Banner had her hand
> Embroider'd (such was the command)
> The Sacred Cross ; and figur'd there
> The five dear wounds our Lord did bear.

The song then proceeds to describe the rising of Northumberland and Westmoreland, in the following lofty and spirited strains—

> Two earls fast leagu'd in discontent,
> Who gave their wishes open vent ;
> And boldly urg'd a general plea,
> The rites of ancient piety
> To be by force of arms renew'd ;
> Glad prospect for the multitude !
> And that same Banner, on whose breast
> The blameless Lady had exprest
> Memorials chosen to give life
> And sunshine to a dangerous strife ;
> This Banner, &c.

The poet, however, puts out all his strength in the dehortation which he makes Francis Norton address to his father, when the preparations are completed, and the household is ready to take the field.

—— Francis Norton said,
'O Father! rise not in this fray—
The hairs are white upon your head;
Dear Father, hear me when I say
It is for you too late a day!
Bethink you of your own good name;
A just and gracious queen have we,
A pure religion, and the claim
Of peace on our humanity.
'Tis meet that I endure your scorn,—
I am your son, your eldest born:
The Banner touch not, stay your hand,—
This multitude of men disband,
And live at home in blissful ease.'

The warlike father makes no answer to this exquisite address, but turns in silent scorn to the banner,

And his wet eyes are glorified;

and forthwith he marches out, at the head of his sons and retainers.

Francis is very sad when thus left alone in the mansion—and still worse when he sees his sister sitting under a tree near the door. However, though 'he cannot choose but shrink and sigh', he goes up to her and says,

'Gone are they—they have their desire;
And I with thee one hour will stay,
To give thee comfort if I may.'
He paused, her silence to partake,
And long it was before he spake:

Then, all at once, *his thoughts turn'd round,*
And fervent words a passage found.
'Gone are they, bravely, though misled,
With a dear Father at their head!
The Sons obey a natural lord;
The Father had given a solemn word
To noble Percy,—and a force
Still stronger bends him to his course.
This said, our tears to-day may fall
As at an innocent funeral.
In deep and awful channel runs
This sympathy of Sire and Sons;
Untried our Brothers were belov'd,
And now their faithfulness is prov'd;
For faithful we must call them, bearing
That soul of conscientious daring.'

After a great deal more, as touching and sensible, he applies himself more directly to the unhappy case of his hearer, whom he thus judiciously comforts and flatters:

'Hope nothing, if I thus may speak
To thee a woman, and thence weak;
Hope nothing, I repeat; for we
Are doom'd to perish utterly;
'Tis meet that thou with me divide
The thought while I am by thy side,
Acknowledging a grace in this,
A comfort in the dark abyss:
But look not for me when I am gone,
And be no farther wrought upon.
Farewell all wishes, all debate,
All prayers for this cause, or for that!
Weep, if that aid thee; but depend
Upon no help of outward friend;
Espouse thy doom at once, and cleave
*To fortitude without reprieve.*'

It is impossible, however, to go regularly on with this goodly matter.—The Third Canto brings the Nortons and their banner to the head-quarters of the insurgent Earls; and describes the first exploits of those conscientious warriors, who took possession of the Cathedral of Durham,

> Sang Mass,—and tore the book of Prayer,—
> And trod the Bible beneath their feet.

Elated by this triumph they turn to the south.

> To London were the Chieftains bent:
> But what avails the bold intent?
> A Royal army is gone forth
> To quell the Rising of the North;
> They march with Dudley at their head,
> And in seven days' space, will to York be led!—
> And Neville was opprest with fear;
> For, though he bore a valiant name,
> His heart was of a timid frame.

So they agree to march back again; at which old Norton is sorely afflicted—and Francis takes the opportunity to renew his dehortations—but is again repulsed with scorn, and falls back to his station in the rear.

The Fourth Canto shows Emily walking by the fish-ponds and arbours of Rylstone, in a fine moonshiny night, with her favourite white Doe not far off.

> Yet the meek Creature was not free,
> Erewhile, *from some perplexity*:
> For thrice hath she approach'd, this day,
> The thought-bewilder'd Emily.

However, they are tolerably reconciled that evening; and by and by, just a few minutes after nine, an old

retainer of the house comes to comfort her, and is sent to follow the host and bring back tidings of their success.—The worthy yeoman sets out with great alacrity ; but not having much hope, it would appear, of the cause, says to himself as he goes,

> 'Grant that the moon which shines this night,
> May guide them in a prudent flight ! '

Things, however, had already come to a still worse issue—as the poet very briefly and ingeniously intimates in the following fine lines :—

> Their flight the fair moon may not see ;
> For, from mid-heaven, already she
> Hath witness'd their captivity !

They had made a rash assault, it seems, on Barnard Castle, and had been all made prisoners, and forwarded to York for trial.

The Fifth Canto shows us Emily watching on a commanding height for the return of her faithful messenger ; who accordingly arrives forthwith, and tells, 'as gently as could be,' the unhappy catastrophe which he had come soon enough to witness. The only comfort he can offer is that Francis is still alive.

> To take his life they have not dar'd.
> On him and on his high endeavour
> The light of praise shall shine for ever !
> Nor did he (such Heaven's will) in vain
> His solitary course maintain ;
> Nor vainly struggled in the might
> Of duty seeing with clear sight.

He then tells how the father and his eight sons were led out to execution ; and how Francis, at his

father's request, took their banner, and promised to bring it back to Bolton Priory.

The Sixth Canto opens with the homeward pilgrimage of this unhappy youth; and there is something so truly forlorn and tragical in his situation, that we should really have thought it difficult to have given an account of it without exciting some degree of interest or emotion. Mr. Wordsworth, however, reserves all his pathos for describing the whiteness of the pet doe, and disserting about her perplexities and her high communion, and participation of Heaven's grace;—and deals in this sort with the orphan son, turning from the bloody scaffold of all his line, with their luckless banner in his hand.

> He look'd about like one betray'd;
> What hath he done? what promise made?
> Oh weak, weak moment! to what end
> Can such a vain oblation tend,
> And he the Bearer?—Can he go
> Carrying this Instrument of woe,
> And find, find any where, a right
> To excuse him in his Country's sight?
> No, will not all Men deem the change
> A downward course? perverse and strange?
> Here is it,—but how, when? must she,
> The unoffending Emily,
> Again this piteous object see?
> Such conflict long did he maintain
> Within himself, and found no rest;
> Calm liberty he could not gain;
> And yet the service was unblest.
> His own life into danger brought
> By this sad burden—even that thought
> Rais'd self-suspicion, which was strong,
> Swaying the brave Man to his wrong:

And how, unless it were the sense
Of all-disposing Providence,
Its will intelligibly shown,
Finds he the Banner in his hand,
Without a thought to such intent ?

His death is not much less pathetic. A troop of the Queen's horse surround him, and reproach him, we must confess with some plausibility, with having kept his hands unarmed, only from dread of death and forfeiture, while he was all the while a traitor in his heart. The sage Francis answers the insolent troopers as follows :—

'I am no traitor,' Francis said,
'Though this unhappy freight I bear ;
It weakens me ; my heart hath bled
Till it is weak—but you beware,
Nor do a suffering Spirit wrong,
Whose self-reproaches are too strong ! '

This virtuous and reasonable person, however, has ill luck in all his dissuasories ; for one of the horsemen puts a pike into him without more ado—and

There did he lie of breath forsaken !

And after some time the neighbouring peasants take him up, and bury him in the churchyard of Bolton Priory.

The Seventh and last Canto contains the history of the desolated Emily and her faithful doe ; but so very discreetly and cautiously written, that we will engage that the most tender-hearted reader shall peruse it without the least risk of any excessive emotion. The poor lady runs about indeed for some years in a very disconsolate way, in a worsted gown and flannel nightcap : but at last the old white doe

finds her out, and takes again to following her—whereupon Mr. Wordsworth breaks out into this fine and natural rapture.

> Oh, moment ever blest! O Pair!
> Belov'd of Heaven, Heaven's choicest care!
> This was for you a precious greeting,—
> For both a bounteous, fruitful meeting.
> Join'd are they; and the sylvan Doe
> Can she depart? can she forgo
> The Lady, once her playful Peer?
>
> That day, the first of a re-union
> Which was to teem with high communion,
> That day of balmy April weather,
> They tarried in the wood together.

What follows is not quite so intelligible.

> When Emily by morning light
> Went forth, the Doe was there in sight.
> She shrunk:—with one frail shock of pain,
> Received and followed by a prayer,
> Did she behold—saw once again;
> Shun will she not, she feels, will bear;—
> But wheresoever she look'd round
> All now was trouble-haunted ground.

It certainly is not easy to guess what could be in the mind of the author when he penned these four last inconceivable lines; but we are willing to infer that the lady's loneliness was cheered by this mute associate; and that the doe, in return, found a certain comfort in the lady's company—

> Communication, like the ray
> Of a new morning, to the nature
> And prospects of the inferior Creature!

In due time the poor lady dies, and is buried beside her mother ; and the doe continues to haunt the places which they had frequented together, and especially to come and pasture every Sunday upon the fine grass in Bolton churchyard, the gate of which is never opened but on occasion of the weekly service.—In consequence of all which we are assured by Mr. Wordsworth that she 'is approved by Earth and Sky, in their benignity ; and moreover, that the old Priory itself takes her for a daughter of the Eternal Prime,'—which we have no doubt is a very great compliment, though we have not the good luck to understand what it means.

> And aye, methinks, this hoary Pile,
> Subdued by outrage and decay,
> Looks down upon her with a smile,
> A gracious smile, that seems to say,
> 'Thou, thou art not a Child of Time,
> But Daughter of the Eternal Prime!'

[Before the review of the *Excursion*, Jeffrey had written only one article on Wordsworth (*Poems* of 1807—October, 1807), but he had referred to Wordsworth frequently, as in the articles on *Thalaba* (October, 1802), Crabbe (April, 1808), and Burns (January, 1809). He reviewed the *Tour on the Continent* in November, 1822. He reprinted only the articles on the *Excursion* and the *White Doe*.

The term 'the Lake school', or 'the Lake poets', is due to Jeffrey. The article of October, 1807, begins thus:—'This author is known to belong to a certain brotherhood of poets, who have haunted for some years about the Lakes of Cumberland; and is generally looked upon, we believe, as the purest model of the excellences and peculiarities of the school which they have been labouring to establish.' But the attack on the school had been opened in the article on *Thalaba*:—'The author who is now before us, belongs to a *sect* of poets, that has established itself in this country within these ten or twelve years,' &c.]

# ROBERT SOUTHEY

(JUNE, 1815.)

*Roderick: The Last of the Goths.* By ROBERT SOUTHEY, Esq., *Poet-Laureate, and Member of the Royal Spanish Academy.* 4to, pp. 477. London, 1814 [1].

THIS is the best, we think, and the most powerful of all Mr. Southey's poems. It abounds with lofty sentiments and magnificent imagery; and contains more rich and comprehensive descriptions—more beautiful pictures of pure affection—and more impressive representations of mental agony and exaltation than we have often met with in the compass of a single volume.

A work, of which all this can be said with justice, cannot be without great merit; and ought not, it may be presumed, to be without great popularity. Justice, however, has something more to say of it: and we are not quite sure either that it will be very

I have, in my time, said petulant and provoking things of Mr. Southey:—and such as I would not say now. But I am not conscious that I was ever unfair to his poetry: and if I have noted what I thought its faults, in too arrogant and derisive a spirit, I think I have never failed to give hearty and cordial praise to its beauties—and generally dwelt much more largely on the latter than the former. Few things, at all events, would now grieve me more, than to think I might give pain to his many friends and admirers, by reprinting, so soon after his death, any thing which might appear derogatory either to his character or his genius; and therefore, though I cannot say that I have substantially changed any of the opinions I have formerly expressed as to his writings, I only insert in this publication my review of his last considerable poem: which may be taken as conveying my matured opinion of his merits—and will be felt, I trust, to have done no scanty or unwilling justice to his great and peculiar powers

popular, or that it deserves to be so. It is too monotonous—too wordy—and too uniformly stately, tragical, and emphatic.—Above all, it is now and then a little absurd—and pretty frequently not a little affected.

The author is a poet undoubtedly; but not of the highest order. There is rather more of rhetoric than of inspiration about him—and we have oftener to admire his taste and industry in borrowing and adorning, than the boldness or felicity of his inventions. He has indisputably a great gift of amplifying and exalting; but uses it, we must say, rather unmercifully. He is never plain, concise, or unaffectedly simple, and is so much bent upon making the most of everything, that he is perpetually overdoing. His sentiments and situations are, of course, sometimes ordinary enough; but the tone of emphasis and pretension is never for a moment relaxed; and the most trivial occurrences, and fantastical distresses, are commemorated with the same vehemence and exaggeration of manner, as the most startling incidents, or the deepest and most heart-rending disasters. This want of relief and variety is sufficiently painful of itself in a work of such length; but its worst effect is, that it gives an air of falsetto and pretension to the whole strain of the composition, and makes us suspect the author of imposture and affectation, even when he has good enough cause for his agonies and raptures.

How is it possible, indeed, to commit our sympathies, without distrust, to the hands of a writer, who, after painting with infinite force the anguish of soul which pursued the fallen Roderick into the retreat to which his crimes had driven him, proceeds with redoubled emphasis to assure us, that neither his remorse nor his downfall were half so intolerable to

him, as *the shocking tameness of the sea birds* who flew round about him in that utter solitude! and were sometimes so familiar as to brush his cheek with their wings?

> For his lost crown
> And sceptre never had he felt a thought
> Of pain: Repentance had no pangs to spare
> For trifles such as these. The loss of these
> Was a cheap penalty: . . that he had fallen
> Down to the lowest depth of wretchedness,
> His hope and consolation. But to lose
> His human station in the scale of things, . . .
> *To see brute Nature scorn him, and renounce*
> *Its homage to the human form divine!* . . .
> Had then almighty vengeance thus reveal'd
> His punishment, and was he fallen indeed
> Below fallen man, . . . below redemption's reach, . . .
> Made lower than the beasts?

This, if we were in bad humour, we should be tempted to say was little better than drivelling;—and certainly the folly of it is greatly aggravated by the tone of intense solemnity in which it is conveyed: but the worst fault by far, and the most injurious to the effect of the author's greatest beauties, is the extreme diffuseness and verbosity of his style, and his unrelenting anxiety to leave nothing to the fancy, the feeling, or even the plain understanding of his readers—but to have everything set down, and impressed and hammered into them, which it may any how conduce to his glory that they should comprehend. There never was any author, we are persuaded, who had so great a distrust of his readers' capacity, or such an unwillingness to leave any opportunity of shining unimproved: and accordingly, we rather think there is no author, who, with the same talents and attainments, has been so generally thought

tedious—or acquired, on the whole, a popularity so inferior to his real deservings. On the present occasion, we have already said, his deservings appear to us unusually great, and his faults less than commonly conspicuous. But though there is less childishness and trifling in this, than in any of his other productions, there is still, we are afraid, enough of tediousness and affected energy, very materially to osbtruct the popularity which the force, and the tenderness and beauty of its better parts, might have otherwise commanded.

There is one blemish, however, which we think peculiar to the work before us; and that is, the outrageously religious, or rather fanatical, tone which pervades its whole structure:—the excessive horror and abuse with which the Mahometans are uniformly spoken of on account of their religion alone; and the offensive frequency and familiarity with which the name and the sufferings of our Saviour are referred to at every turn of the story. The spirit which is here evinced towards the Moors, not only by their valiant opponents, but by the author when speaking in his own person, is neither that of pious reprobation nor patriotic hatred, but of savage and bigoted persecution; and the heroic character and heroic deeds of his greatest favourites are debased and polluted by the paltry superstitions, and sanguinary fanaticism, which he is pleased to ascribe to them. This, which we are persuaded would be revolting in a nation of zealous Catholics, must be still more distasteful, we think, among sober Protestants; while, on the other hand, the constant introduction of the holiest persons, and most solemn rites of religion, for the purpose of helping on the flagging interest of a story devised for amusement, can scarcely fail to give scandal and offence to all persons of right feeling

or just taste. This remark may be thought a little rigorous by those who have not looked into the work to which it is applied—for they can have no idea of the extreme frequency, and palpable extravagance, of the allusions and invocations to which we have referred.—One poor woman, for example, who merely appears to give alms to the fallen Roderick in the season of his humiliation, is very needlessly made to exclaim, as she offers her pittance,

> Christ Jesus, for his Mother's sake,
> Have mercy on thee.

—and soon after, the King himself, when he hears one of his subjects uttering curses on his name, is pleased to say,

> Oh, for the love of Jesus curse him not!
> O brother, do not curse that sinful soul,
> Which Jesus suffer'd on the cross to save!

Whereupon, one of the more charitable auditors rejoins,

> Christ bless thee, brother, for that Christian speech!

—and so the talk goes on, through the greater part of the poem. Now, we must say we think this both indecent and ungraceful; and look upon it as almost as exceptionable a way of increasing the solemnity of poetry, as common swearing is of adding to the energy of discourse.

We are not quite sure whether we should reckon his choice of a subject, among Mr. Southey's errors on the present occasion; but certainly no theme could well have been suggested more utterly alien to all English prejudices, traditions, and habits of poetical contemplation, than the domestic history of the last

Gothic King of Spain,—a history extremely remote and obscure in itself, and treating of persons and places and events with which no visions or glories are associated in English imaginations. The subject, however, was selected, we suppose, during that period when a zeal for Spanish liberty and a belief in Spanish virtue, spirit, and talent, were extremely fashionable in this country; and before 'the universal Spanish people' had made themselves the objects of mixed contempt and compassion, by rushing prone into the basest and most insulted servitude that was ever asserted over human beings. From this degradation we do not think they will be redeemed by all the heroic acts recorded in this poem,—the interest of which, we suspect, will be considerably lowered, by the late revolution in public opinion as to the merits of the nation to whose fortunes it relates. After all, however, we think it must be allowed, that any author who interests us in his story, has either the merit of choosing a good subject, or a still higher merit;—and Mr. Southey, in our opinion, has made his story very interesting. Nor should it be forgotten that by the choice which he has made, he has secured immense squadrons of Moors, with their Asiatic gorgeousness, and their cymbals, turbans, and Paynim chivalry, to give a picturesque effect to his battles—and bevies of veiled virgins and ladies in armour—and hermits and bishops—and mountain villagers—and torrents and forests, and cork trees and sierras, to remind us of *Don Quixote*—and store of sonorous names:—and altogether, he might have chosen worse among more familiar objects. . . .

These copious extracts must have settled our readers' opinion of this poem; and though they are certainly taken from the better parts of it, we have no wish to disturb the forcible impression which they must have

been the means of producing. Its chief fault undoubtedly is the monotony of its tragic and solemn tone—the perpetual gloom with which all its scenes are overcast—and the tediousness with which some of them are developed. There are many dull passages, in short, and a considerable quantity of heavy reading —some silliness, and a good deal of affectation. But the beauties, upon the whole, preponderate;—and these, we hope, speak for themselves in the passages we have already extracted.

The versification is smooth and melodious, though too uniformly drawn out into a long and linked sweetness. The diction is as usual more remarkable for copiousness than force; and though less defaced than formerly with phrases of affected simplicity and infantine pathos, is still too much speckled with strange words; which, whether they are old or new, are not English at the present day—and we hope never will become so. What use or ornament does Mr. Southey expect to derive for his poetry from such words as *avid* and *aureate*, and *auriphrygiate*? or *leman* and *weedery*, *frequentage* and *youthhead*, and twenty more as pedantic and affected? What good is there either, we should like to know, in talking of 'oaken galilees', or 'incarnadined poitrels', or 'allable Providence', and such other points of learning? —If poetry is intended for general delight, ought not its language to be generally intelligible?

[Southey's *Thalaba* was the subject of Jeffrey's first literary article in the *Edinburgh* (No. 1, October, 1802). He reviewed also *Madoc* (October, 1805), *Kehama* (February, 1811), *Roderick* (June, 1815), the *Lay of the Laureate* (June, 1816), *Wat Tyler* (March, 1817), and the *Vision of Judgement* (July, 1821). Of these seven articles only the review of *Roderick* was reprinted.]

# LORD BYRON

(December, 1816.)

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto the Third.* By Lord Byron. 8vo, pp. 79. London, 1816.
*The Prisoner of Chillon, and other Poems.* By Lord Byron. 8vo, pp. 60. London, 1816.

If the finest poetry be that which leaves the deepest impression on the minds of its readers—and this is not the worst test of its excellence—Lord Byron, we think, must be allowed to take precedence of all his distinguished contemporaries. He has not the variety of Scott—nor the delicacy of Campbell—nor the absolute truth of Crabbe—nor the polished sparkling of Moore; but in force of diction, and inextinguishable energy of sentiment, he clearly surpasses them all. 'Words that breathe, and thoughts that burn,' are not merely the ornaments, but the common staple of his poetry; and he is not inspired or impressive only in some happy passages, but through the whole body and tissue of his composition. It was an unavoidable condition, perhaps, of this higher excellence, that his scene should be narrow, and his persons few. To compass such ends as he had in view, it was necessary to reject all ordinary agents, and all trivial combinations. He could not possibly be amusing, or ingenious, or playful; or hope to maintain the requisite pitch of interest by the recitation of sprightly adventures, or the opposition of common characters. To produce great effects, in short, he felt that it was necessary to deal only with the greater passions—with the exaltations of a daring fancy, and

the errors of a lofty intellect—with the pride, the terrors, and the agonies of strong emotion—the fire and air alone of our human elements.

In this respect, and in his general notion of the end and the means of poetry, we have sometimes thought that his views fell more in with those of the Lake poets, than of any other existing party in the poetical commonwealth : and, in some of his later productions especially, it is impossible not to be struck with his occasional approaches to the style and manner of this class of writers. Lord Byron, however, it should be observed, like all other persons of a quick sense of beauty, and sure enough of their own originality to be in no fear of paltry imputations, is a great mimic of styles and manners, and a great borrower of external character. He and Scott, accordingly, are full of imitations of all the writers from whom they have ever derived gratification ; and the two most original writers of the age might appear, to superficial observers, to be the most deeply indebted to their predecessors. In this particular instance, we have no fault to find with Lord Byron : for undoubtedly the finer passages of Wordsworth and Southey have in them wherewithal to lend an impulse to the utmost ambition of rival genius ; and their diction and manner of writing is frequently both striking and original. But we must say, that it would afford us still greater pleasure to find these tuneful gentlemen returning the compliment which Lord Byron has here paid to their talents ; and forming themselves on the model rather of his imitations, than of their own originals. In those imitations they will find that, though he is sometimes abundantly mystical, he never, or at least very rarely, indulges in absolute nonsense —never takes his lofty flights upon mean or ridiculous occasions—and, above all, never dilutes his strong

conceptions, and magnificent imaginations, with a flood of oppressive verbosity. On the contrary, he is, of all living writers, the most concise and condensed; and, we would fain hope, may go far, by his example, to redeem the great reproach of our modern literature—its intolerable prolixity and redundance. In his nervous and manly lines, we find no elaborate amplification of common sentiments—no ostentatious polishing of pretty expressions; and we really think that the brilliant success which has rewarded his disdain of those paltry artifices, should put to shame for ever that puling and self-admiring race, who can live through half a volume on the stock of a single thought, and expatiate over diverse fair quarto pages with the details of one tedious description. In Lord Byron, on the contrary, we have a perpetual stream of thick-coming fancies—an eternal spring of fresh-blown images, which seem called into existence by the sudden flash of those glowing thoughts and overwhelming emotions, that struggle for expression through the whole flow of his poetry—and impart to a diction that is often abrupt and irregular, a force and a charm which frequently realize all that is said of inspiration.

With all these undoubted claims to our admiration, however, it is impossible to deny that the noble author before us has still something to learn, and a good deal to correct. He is frequently abrupt and careless, and sometimes obscure. There are marks, occasionally, of effort and straining after an emphasis, which is generally spontaneous; and, above all, there is far too great a monotony in the moral colouring of his pictures, and too much repetition of the same sentiments and maxims. He delights too exclusively in the delineation of a certain morbid exaltation of character and of feeling—a sort of demoniacal sub-

limity, not without some traits of the ruined Archangel. He is haunted almost perpetually with the image of a being feeding and fed upon by violent passions, and the recollections of the catastrophes they have occasioned : and, though worn out by their past indulgence, unable to sustain the burden of an existence which they do not continue to animate :—full of pride, and revenge, and obduracy—disdaining life and death, and mankind and himself—and trampling, in his scorn, not only upon the falsehood and formality of polished life, but upon its tame virtues and slavish devotion : yet envying, by fits, the very beings he despises, and melting into mere softness and compassion, when the helplessness of childhood or the frailty of woman make an appeal to his generosity. Such is the person with whom we are called upon almost exclusively to sympathize in all the greater productions of this distinguished writer :—in *Childe Harold* —in the *Corsair*—in *Lara*—in the *Siege of Corinth*—in *Parisina*, and in most of the smaller pieces.

It is impossible to represent such a character better than Lord Byron has done in all these productions—or indeed to represent any thing more terrible in its anger, or more attractive in its relenting. In point of effect, we readily admit that no one character can be more poetical or impressive : but it is really too much to find the scene perpetually filled by one character—not only in all the acts of each several drama, but in all the different dramas of the series ; and, grand and impressive as it is, we feel at last that these very qualities make some relief more indispensable, and oppress the spirits of ordinary mortals with too deep an impression of awe and repulsion. There is too much guilt, in short, and too much gloom, in the leading character ; and though it be a fine thing to gaze, now and then, on stormy seas, and thunder-

shaken mountains, we should prefer passing our days in sheltered valleys, and by the murmur of calmer waters.

We are aware that these metaphors may be turned against us—and that, without metaphor, it may be said that men do not *pass their days* in reading poetry —and that, as they may look into Lord Byron only about as often as they look abroad upon tempests, they have no more reason to complain of him for being grand and gloomy, than to complain of the same qualities in the glaciers and volcanoes which they go so far to visit. Painters, too, it may be said, have often gained great reputation by their representations of tigers and other ferocious animals, or of caverns and banditti—and poets should be allowed, without reproach, to indulge in analogous exercises. We are far from thinking that there is no weight in these considerations; and feel how plausibly it may be said that we have no better reason for a great part of our complaint, than that an author, to whom we are already very greatly indebted, has chosen rather to please himself, than us, in the use he makes of his talents.

This, no doubt, seems both unreasonable and ungrateful: but it is nevertheless true that a public benefactor becomes a debtor to the public; and is, in some degree, responsible for the employment of those gifts which seem to be conferred upon him, not merely for his own delight, but for the delight and improvement of his fellows through all generations. Independent of this, however, we think there is a reply to the apology. A great living poet is not like a distant volcano, or an occasional tempest. He is a volcano in the heart of our land, and a cloud that hangs over our dwellings; and we have some reason to complain, if, instead of genial warmth and grateful shade, he voluntarily darkens and inflames our atmo-

sphere with perpetual fiery explosions and pitchy vapours. Lord Byron's poetry, in short, is too attractive and too famous to lie dormant or inoperative; and, therefore, if it produce any painful or pernicious effects, there will be murmurs, and ought to be suggestions of alteration. Now, though an artist may draw fighting tigers and hungry lions in as lively and natural a way as he can, without giving any encouragement to human ferocity, or even much alarm to human fear, the case is somewhat different, when a poet represents men with tiger-like dispositions:—and yet more so, when he exhausts the resources of his genius to make this terrible being interesting and attractive, and to represent all the lofty virtues as the natural allies of his ferocity. It is still worse when he proceeds to show that all these precious gifts of dauntless courage, strong affection, and high imagination, are not only akin to guilt, but the parents of misery;—and that those only have any chance of tranquillity or happiness in this world, whom it is the object of his poetry to make us shun and despise.

These, it appears to us, are not merely errors in taste, but perversions of morality; and, as a great poet is necessarily a moral teacher, and gives forth his ethical lessons, in general, with far more effect and authority than any of his graver brethren, he is peculiarly liable to the censures reserved for those who turn the means of improvement to purposes of corruption.

It may no doubt be said that poetry in general tends less to the useful than the splendid qualities of our nature—that a character poetically good has long been distinguished from one that is morally so—and that, ever since the time of Achilles, our sympathies, on such occasions, have been chiefly engrossed by persons whose deportment is by no means exemplary; and who in many points approach to the temperament

of Lord Byron's ideal hero. There is some truth in this suggestion also. But other poets, in the *first* place, do not allow their favourites so outrageous a monopoly of the glory and interest of the piece—and sin less therefore against the laws either of poetical or distributive justice. In the *second* place, their heroes are not, generally, either so bad or so good as Lord Byron's—and do not indeed very much exceed the standard of truth and nature, in either of the extremes. His, however, are as monstrous and unnatural as centaurs, and hippogriffs—and must ever figure in the eye of sober reason as so many bright and hateful impossibilities. But the most important distinction is that the other poets who deal in peccant heroes, neither feel nor express that ardent affection for them, which is visible in the whole of this author's delineations; but merely make use of them as necessary agents in the extraordinary adventures they have to detail, and persons whose mingled vices and virtues are requisite to bring about the catastrophe of their story. In Lord Byron, however, the interest of the story, where there happens to be one, which is not always the case, is uniformly postponed to that of the character itself—into which he enters so deeply, and with so extraordinary a fondness, that he generally continues to speak in its language, after it has been dismissed from the stage; and to inculcate, on his own authority, the same sentiments which had been previously recommended by its example. We do not consider it as unfair, therefore, to say that Lord Byron appears to us to be the zealous apostle of a certain fierce and magnificent misanthropy; which has already saddened his poetry with too deep a shade, and not only led to a great misapplication of great talents, but contributed to render popular some very false estimates of the constituents of human happiness and merit.

(FEBRUARY, 1822.)

*Sardanapalus, a Tragedy. The Two Foscari, a Tragedy. Cain, a Mystery.* By Lord BYRON. 8vo, pp. 440. Murray. London, 1822.

IT must be a more difficult thing to write a good play—or even a good dramatic poem—than we had imagined. Not that we should, *a priori*, have imagined it to be very easy: but it is impossible not to be struck with the fact, that, in comparatively rude times, when the resources of the art had been less carefully considered, and Poetry certainly had not collected all her materials, success seems to have been more frequently, and far more easily obtained. From the middle of Elizabeth's reign till the end of James's, the drama formed by far the most brilliant and beautiful part of our poetry—and indeed of our literature in general. From that period to the Revolution, it lost a part of its splendour and originality; but still continued to occupy the most conspicuous and considerable place in our literary annals. For the last century it has been quite otherwise. Our poetry has ceased almost entirely to be dramatic; and, though men of great name and great talent have occasionally adventured into this once fertile field, they have reaped no laurels, and left no trophies behind them. The genius of Dryden appears nowhere to so little advantage as in his tragedies; and the contrast is truly humiliating when, in a presumptuous attempt to heighten the colouring, or enrich the simplicity of Shakespeare, he bedaubs with obscenity, or deforms with rant, the genuine passion and profligacy of Antony and Cleopatra—or intrudes on the enchanted solitude of Prospero and his daughter, with the tones of worldly gallantry, or the caricatures of affected

simplicity. Otway, with the sweet and mellow diction of the former age, had none of its force, variety, or invention. Its decaying fires burst forth in some strong and irregular flashes, in the disorderly scenes of Lee; and sank at last in the ashes, and scarcely glowing embers, of Rowe.

Since his time—till very lately—the school of our ancient dramatists has been deserted: and we can scarcely say that any new one has been established. Instead of the irregular and comprehensive plot—the rich discursive dialogue—the ramblings of fancy—the magic creations of poetry—the rapid succession of incidents and characters—the soft, flexible, and ever-varying diction—and the flowing, continuous, and easy versification, which characterized those masters of the golden time, we have had tame, formal, elaborate, and stately compositions—meagre stories—few personages—characters decorous and consistent, but without nature or spirit—a guarded, timid, classical diction—ingenious and methodical disquisitions—turgid or sententious declamations—and a solemn and monotonous strain of versification. Nor can this be ascribed, even plausibly, to any decay of genius among us; for the most remarkable failures have fallen on the highest talents. We have already hinted at the miscarriages of Dryden. The exquisite taste and fine observation of Addison produced only the solemn mawkishness of *Cato*. The beautiful fancy, the gorgeous diction, and generous affections of Thomson were chilled and withered as soon as he touched the verge of the Drama; where his name is associated with a mass of verbose puerility, which it is difficult to conceive could ever have proceeded from the author of the *Seasons* and the *Castle of Indolence*. Even the mighty intellect, the eloquent morality, and lofty style of Johnson, which gave too tragic and

magnificent a tone to his ordinary writing, failed altogether to support him in his attempt to write actual tragedy; and *Irene* is not only unworthy of the imitator of Juvenal and the author of *Rasselas* and the *Lives of the Poets*, but is absolutely, and in itself, nothing better than a tissue of wearisome and unimpassioned declamations. We have named the most celebrated names in our literature, since the decline of the drama, almost to our own days; and if *they* have neither lent any new honours to the stage, nor borrowed any from it, it is needless to say that those who adventured with weaker powers had no better fortune. The *Mourning Bride* of Congreve, the *Revenge* of Young, and the *Douglas* of Home [we cannot add the *Mysterious Mother* of Walpole—even to please Lord Byron], are almost the only tragedies of the last age that are familiar to the present; and they are evidently the works of a feebler and more effeminate generation—indicating, as much by their exaggerations as by their timidity, their own consciousness of inferiority to their great predecessors—whom they affected, however, not to imitate, but to supplant.

But the native taste of our people was not thus to be seduced and perverted; and when the wits of Queen Anne's time had lost the authority of living authors, it asserted itself by a fond recurrence to its original standards, and a resolute neglect of the more regular and elaborate dramas by which they had been succeeded. Shakespeare, whom it had long been the fashion to decry and even ridicule, as the poet of a rude and barbarous age[1], was reinstated in

[1] It is not a little remarkable to find such a man as Goldsmith joining in this pitiful sneer. In his *Vicar of Wakefield*, he constantly represents his famous town ladies, Miss Carolina Amelia Wilelmina Skeggs, and the other, as discoursing about 'high life,

his whole supremacy : and when his legitimate progeny could no longer be found at home, his spurious issue were hailed with rapture from foreign countries, and invited and welcomed with the most eager enthusiasm on their arrival. The German imitations of Schiller and Kotzebue, caricatured and distorted as they were by the aberrations of a vulgar and vitiated taste, had still so much of the raciness and vigour of the old English drama, from which they were avowedly derived, that they instantly became more popular in England than anything that her own artists had recently produced ; and served still more effectually to recall our affections to their native and legitimate rulers. Then followed republications of Massinger, and Beaumont and Fletcher, and Ford, and their contemporaries—and a host of new tragedies, all written in avowed and elaborate imitation of the ancient models. Miss Baillie, we rather think, had the merit of leading the way in this return to our old allegiance—and then came a volume of plays by Mr. Chenevix, and a succession of single plays, all of considerable merit, from Mr. Coleridge, Mr. Maturin, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Barry Cornwall, and Mr. Milman. The first and the last of these names are the most likely to be remembered ; but none of them, we fear, will ever be ranked with the older worthies ; nor is it conceivable that any age should ever class them together.

*Shakespeare*, and the musical glasses!'—And, in a more serious passage, he introduces a player as astonishing the Vicar by informing him that 'Dryden and Rowe's manner were quite out of fashion—our taste has gone back a whole century ; Fletcher, Ben Jonson, and, above all, the *plays of Shakespeare*, are the only things that go down.' 'How!' says the Vicar, 'is it possible that the present age can be pleased with *that antiquated dialect*, that *obsolete humour*, and those *overcharged characters* which abound in the works you mention?' No writer of name, who was not aiming at a paradox, would venture to say this now.

We do not mean, however, altogether to deny that there may be some illusion, in our habitual feelings, as to the merits of the great originals—consecrated as they are, in our imaginations, by early admiration, and associated, as all their peculiarities and the mere accidents and oddities of their diction now are, with the recollection of their intrinsic excellences. It is owing to this, we suppose, that we can scarcely venture to ask ourselves, steadily, and without an inward startling and feeling of alarm, what reception one of Shakespeare's irregular plays—the *Tempest*, for example, or the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*—would be likely to meet with, if it were *now* to appear for the first time, without name, notice, or preparation? Nor can we pursue the hazardous supposition through all the possibilities to which it invites us, without something like a sense of impiety and profanation. Yet, though some little superstition may mingle with our faith, we must still believe it to be the true one. Though time may have hallowed many things that were at first but common, and accidental associations imparted a charm to much that was in itself indifferent, we cannot but believe that there was an original sanctity, which time only matured and extended—and an inherent charm from which the association derived all its power. And when we look candidly and calmly to the works of our early dramatists, it is impossible, we think, to dispute, that after criticism has done its worst on them—after all deductions for impossible plots and fantastical characters, unaccountable forms of speech, and occasional extravagance, indelicacy, and horrors—there is a facility and richness about them, both of thought and of diction—a force of invention, and a depth of sagacity—an originality of conception, and a play of fancy—a nakedness and energy of passion, and, above all, a copiousness of

imagery, and a sweetness and flexibility of verse, which is altogether unrivalled, in earlier or in later times;—and places them, in our estimation, in the very highest and foremost place among ancient or modern poets.

It is in these particulars that the inferiority of their recent imitators is most apparent—in the want of ease and variety—originality and grace. There is, in all their attempts, whatever may be their other merits or defects, an air of anxiety and labour—and indications, by far too visible, at once of timidity and ambition. This may arise, in part, from the fact of their being, too obviously and consciously, imitators. They do not aspire so much to rival the genius of their originals, as to copy their manner. They do not write as *they* would have written in the present day, but as they imagine they themselves would have written two hundred years ago. They revive the antique phraseology, repeat the venerable oaths, and emulate the quaint familiarities of that classical period—and wonder that they are not mistaken for new incarnations of its departed poets! One great cause why they are not, is, that they speak an unnatural dialect, and are constrained by a masquerade habit; in neither of which it is possible to display that freedom, and those delicate traits of character, which are the life of the drama, and were among the chief merits of those who once exalted it so highly. Another bad effect of imitation, and especially of the imitation of unequal and irregular models in a critical age, is, that nothing is thought fit to be copied but the exquisite and shining passages;—from which it results, in the *first* place, that all our rivalry is reserved for occasions in which its success is most hopeless; and, in the *second* place, that instances, even of occasional success, want their proper grace and effect, by being deprived of the

relief, shading, and preparation, which they would naturally have received in a less fastidious composition; and, instead of the warm and native and ever-varying graces of a spontaneous effusion, the work acquires the false and feeble brilliancy of a prize essay in a foreign tongue—a collection of splendid patches of different texture and pattern.

At the bottom of all this—and perhaps as its most efficient cause—there lurks, we suspect, an unreasonable and undue dread of criticism;— not the deliberate and indulgent criticism which *we* exercise, rather for the encouragement of talent than its warning—but the vigilant and paltry derision which is perpetually stirring in idle societies, and but too continually present to the spirits of all who aspire to their notice. There is nothing so certain, we take it, as that those who are the most alert in discovering the faults of a work of genius, are the least touched with its beauties. Those who admire and enjoy fine poetry, in short, are quite a different class of persons from those who find out its flaws and defects—who are sharp at detecting a plagiarism or a grammatical inaccuracy, and laudably industrious in bringing to light an obscure passage—sneering at an exaggerated one—or wondering at the meaning of some piece of excessive simplicity. It is in vain to expect the praises of such people; for they never praise;—and it is truly very little worth while to disarm their censure. It is only the praises of the real lovers of poetry that ever give it true fame or popularity—and these are little affected by the cavils of the fastidious. Yet the genius of most modern writers seems to be rebuked under that of those pragmatical and insignificant censors. They are so much afraid of faults, that they will scarcely venture upon beauties; and seem more anxious in general to be *safe*, than original. They dare not in-

dulge in a florid and magnificent way of writing, for fear of being charged with bombast by the cold-blooded and malignant. They must not be tender, lest they should be laughed at for puling and whining; nor discursive nor fanciful like their great predecessors, under pain of being held out to derision, as ingenious gentlemen who have dreamed that the gods have made them poetical!

Thus, the dread of ridicule, which they have ever before their eyes, represses all the emotions, on the expression of which their success entirely depends; and in order to escape the blame of those to whom they can give no pleasure, and through whom they can gain no fame, they throw away their best chance of pleasing those who are capable of relishing their excellences, and on whose admiration alone their reputation must at all events be founded. There is a great want of magnanimity, we think, as well as of wisdom, in this sensitiveness to blame; and we are convinced that no modern author will ever write with the grace and vigour of the older ones, who does not write with some portion of their fearlessness and indifference to censure. *Courage*, in short, is at least as necessary as genius to the success of a work of imagination; since, without this, it is impossible to attain that freedom and self-possession, without which no talents can ever have fair play, and, far less, that inward confidence and exaltation of spirit which must accompany all the higher acts of the understanding. The earlier writers had probably less occasion for courage to secure them these advantages; as the public was far less critical in their day, and much more prone to admiration than to derision: but we can still trace in their writings the indications both of a proud consciousness of their own powers and privileges, and of a brave contempt for the cavils to

which they might expose themselves. In our own times, we know but one writer who is emancipated from this slavish awe of vulgar detraction—this petty timidity about being detected in blunders and faults; and that is the illustrious author of *Waverley*, and the other novels that have made an era in our literature as remarkable, and as likely to be remembered, as any which can yet be traced in its history. We shall not now say how large a portion of his success we ascribe to this intrepid temper of his genius; but we are confident that no person can read any one of his wonderful works, without feeling that their author was utterly careless of the reproach of small imperfections; disdained the inglorious labour of perpetual correctness, and has *consequently* imparted to his productions that spirit and ease and variety, which reminds us of better times, and gives lustre and effect to those rich and resplendent passages to which it left him free to aspire.

Lord Byron, in some respects, may appear not to have been wanting in intrepidity. He has not certainly been very tractable to advice, nor very patient of blame. But this, in him, we fear, is not superiority to censure, but aversion to it; and, instead of proving that he is indifferent to detraction, shows only that the dread and dislike of it operate with more than common force on his mind. A critic whose object was to give pain, would desire no better proof of the efficacy of his inflictions, than the bitter scorn and fierce defiance with which they are encountered; and the more vehemently the noble author protests that he despises the reproaches that have been bestowed on him, the more certain it is that he suffers from their severity, and would be glad to escape, if he cannot overbear, them. But however this may be, we think it is certain that his late dramatic efforts have not been made carelessly, or without

anxiety. To us, at least, they seem very elaborate and hard-wrought compositions ; and this indeed we take to be their leading characteristic, and the key to most of their peculiarities.

Considered as Poems, we confess they appear to us to be rather heavy, verbose, and inelegant—deficient in the passion and energy which belongs to the other writings of the noble author—and still more in the richness of imagery, the originality of thought, and the sweetness of versification for which he used to be distinguished. They are, for the most part, solemn, prolix, and ostentatious—lengthened out by large preparations for catastrophes that never arrive, and tantalizing us with slight specimens and glimpses of a higher interest, scattered thinly up and down many weary pages of declamation. Along with the concentrated pathos and home-struck sentiments of his former poetry, the noble author seems also, we cannot imagine why, to have discarded the spirited and melodious versification in which they were embodied, and to have formed to himself a measure equally remote from the spring and vigour of his former compositions, and from the softness and flexibility of the ancient masters of the drama. There are some sweet lines, and many of great weight and energy ; but the general march of the verse is cumbrous and unmusical. His lines do not vibrate like polished lances, at once strong and light, in the hands of his persons, but are wielded like clumsy batons in a bloodless affray. Instead of the graceful familiarity and idiomatical melodies of Shakespeare, they are apt, too, to fall into clumsy prose, in their approaches to the easy and colloquial style ; and, in the loftier passages, are occasionally deformed by low and common images, that harmonize but ill with the general solemnity of the diction.

As Plays, we are afraid we must also say that the pieces before us are wanting in interest, character, and action:—at least we must say this of the three last of them,—for *there is* interest in *Sardanapalus*—, and beauties besides, that make us blind to its other defects. There is, however, throughout, a want of dramatic effect and variety; and we suspect there is something in the character or habit of Lord Byron's genius which will render this unattainable. He has too little sympathy with the ordinary feelings and frailties of humanity, to succeed well in their representation—'His soul is like a star, and dwells apart.' It does not 'hold the mirror up to nature', nor catch the hues of surrounding objects; but, like a kindled furnace, throws out its intense glare and gloomy grandeur on the narrow scene which it irradiates. He has given us, in his other works, some glorious pictures of nature—some magnificent reflections, and some inimitable delineations of character: but the same feelings prevail in them all; and his portraits in particular, though a little varied in the drapery and attitude, seem all copied from the same original. His *Childe Harold*, his *Giaour*, *Conrad*, *Lara*, *Manfred*, *Cain*, and *Lucifer*—are all one individual. There is the same varnish of voluptuousness on the surface—the same canker of misanthropy at the core, of all he touches. He cannot draw the changes of many-coloured life, nor transport himself into the condition of the infinitely diversified characters by whom a stage should be peopled. The very intensity of his feelings—the loftiness of his view—the pride of his nature or his genius—withhold him from this identification; so that in personating the heroes of the scene, he does little but repeat himself. It would be better for him, we think, if it were otherwise. We are sure it would be better for his readers. He would get more fame,

and things of far more worth than fame, if he would condescend to a more extended and cordial sympathy with his fellow-creatures; and we should have more variety of fine poetry, and, at all events, better tragedies. We have no business to read him a homily on the sinfulness of pride and uncharity; but we have a right to say that it argues a poorness of genius to keep always to the same topics and persons; and that the world will weary at last of the most energetic pictures of misanthropes and madmen—outlaws and their mistresses!

A man gifted as he is, when he aspires at dramatic fame, should emulate the greatest of dramatists. Let Lord Byron then think of Shakespeare—and consider what a noble range of character, what a freedom from mannerism and egotism, there is in him! How much he seems to have studied nature; how little to have thought about himself; how seldom to have repeated or glanced back at his own most successful inventions! Why indeed should he? Nature was still open before him, and inexhaustible; and the freshness and variety that still delight his readers must have had constant attractions for himself. Take his Hamlet, for instance. What a character is there!—how full of thought and refinement, and fancy and individuality! 'How infinite in faculties! In form and motion how express and admirable! The beauty of the universe, the paragon of animals!' Yet close the play, and we meet with him no more—neither in the author's other works, nor anywhere else! A common author, who had hit upon such a character, would have dragged it in at every turn, and worn it to very tatters. Sir John Falstaff, again, is a world of wit and humour in himself. But except in the two parts of *Henry IV*, there would have been no trace of such a being, had not the author been 'ordered to continue

him' in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. He is not the least like Benedick, or Mercutio, or Sir Toby Belch, or any of the other witty and jovial personages of the same author—nor are they like each other. Othello is one of the most striking and powerful inventions on the stage. But when the play closes, we hear no more of him! The poet's creation comes no more to life again, under a fictitious name, than the real man would have done. Lord Byron, in Shakespeare's place, would have peopled the world with black Othellos! What indications are there of Lear in any of his earlier plays? What traces of it in any that he wrote afterwards? None. It might have been written by any other man, he is so little conscious of it. He never once returns to that huge sea of sorrow; but has left it standing by itself, shoreless and unapproachable! Who else could have afforded not to have 'drowned the stage with tears' from such a source? But we must break away from Shakespeare, and come at last to the work before us.

In a very brief preface, Lord Byron renews his protest against looking upon any of his plays as having been composed 'with the most remote view to the stage,'—and, at the same time, testifies in behalf of the *Unities*, as essential to the existence of the drama—according to what 'was, till lately, the law of literature throughout the world, and is still so, in the more civilized parts of it'. We do not think those opinions very consistent; and we think that neither of them could possibly find favour with a person whose genius had a truly dramatic character. We should as soon expect an orator to compose a speech altogether unfit to be spoken. A drama is not merely a dialogue, but *an action*: and necessarily supposes that something is to pass before the eyes of assembled spectators. Whatever is peculiar to its

written part, should derive its peculiarity from this consideration. Its style should be throughout an accompaniment to action—and should be calculated to excite the emotions, and keep alive the attention, of gazing multitudes. If an author does not bear this continually in his mind, and does not write in the ideal presence of an eager and diversified assemblage, he may be a poet, perhaps, but assuredly he never will be a dramatist. If Lord Byron really does not wish to impregnate his elaborate scenes with the living spirit of the drama—if he has no hankering after stage effect—if he is not haunted with the visible presentment of the persons he has created—if, in setting down a vehement invective, he does not fancy the tone in which Mr. Kean would deliver it, and anticipate the long applauses of the pit, then he may be sure that neither his feelings nor his genius are in unison with the stage at all. Why, then, should he affect the form, without the power of tragedy? He may, indeed, produce a mystery, like *Cain*, or a far sweeter vision, like *Manfred*, without subjecting himself to the censure of legitimate criticism: but if, with a regular subject before him, capable of all the strength and graces of the drama, he does not feel himself able or willing to draw forth its resources so as to affect an audience with terror and delight, he is not the man we want—and his time and talents are wasted here. Didactic reasoning and eloquent description will not compensate, in a play, for a dearth of dramatic spirit and invention: and besides, sterling sense and poetry, as such, ought to stand by themselves, without the unmeaning mockery of a *dramatis personae*.

As to Lord Byron's pretending to set up the *Unities* at this time of day, as 'the law of literature throughout the world', it is mere caprice and contradiction.

He, if ever man was, is *a law to himself*—'a chartered libertine';—and now, when he is tired of this unbridled licence, he wants to do penance within the *Unities*! This certainly looks very like affectation; or, if there is anything sincere in it, the motive must be, that, by getting rid of so much story and action, in order to simplify the plot and bring it within the prescribed limits, he may fill up the blank spaces with long discussions, and have nearly all the talk to himself! For ourselves, we will confess that we have had a considerable contempt for those same *Unities*, ever since we read Dennis's *Criticism on 'Cato'* in our boyhood—except indeed the unity of action, which Lord Byron does not appear to set much store by. Dr. Johnson, we conceive, has pretty well settled this question: and if Lord Byron chooses to grapple with him, he will find that it requires a stronger arm than that with which he puts down our Laureates. We shall only add that when the moderns tie themselves down to write tragedies of the same length, and on the same simple plan, in other respects, with those of Sophocles and Aeschylus, we shall not object to their adhering to the *Unities*; for there can, in that case, be no sufficient inducement for violating them. But in the mean time, we hold that English dramatic poetry soars *above the Unities*, just as the imagination does. The only pretence for insisting on them is that we suppose the stage itself to be, actually and really, the very spot on which a given action is performed; and, if so, this space cannot be removed to another. But the supposition is manifestly quite contrary to truth and experience. The stage is considered merely as a place in which any given action *ad libitum* may be performed; and accordingly may be shifted, and is so in imagination, as often as the action requires it. That any writer should ever have insisted on such an

unity as this, must appear sufficiently preposterous; but, that the defence of it should be taken up by an author whose plays are never to be acted at all, and which, therefore, have nothing more than a nominal reference to any stage or locality whatever, must strike one as absolutely incredible. . . .

We have now gone through the poetical part of this volume, and ought here, perhaps, to close our account of it. But there are a few pages in prose that are more talked of than all the rest; and which lead irresistibly to topics upon which it seems at last necessary that we should express an opinion. We allude to the concluding part of the Appendix to *The Two Foscari*, in which Lord Byron resumes his habitual complaint of the hostility which he has experienced from the writers of his own country—makes reprisals on those who have assailed his reputation—and inflicts, in particular, a memorable chastisement upon the unhappy Laureate, interspersed with some political reflections of great weight and authority.

It is not, however, with these, or the merits of the treatment which Mr. Southey has either given or received, that we have now any concern. But we have a word or two to say on the griefs of Lord Byron himself. He complains bitterly of the detraction by which he has been assailed—and intimates that his works have been received by the public with far less cordiality and favour than he was entitled to expect. We are constrained to say that this appears to us a very extraordinary mistake. In the whole course of our experience, we cannot recollect a single author who has had so little reason to complain of his reception—to whose genius the public has been so early and so constantly just—to whose faults they have been so long and so signally indulgent. From the very first, he must have been aware that he offended

the principles and shocked the prejudices of the majority, by his sentiments, as much as he delighted them by his talents. Yet there never was an author so universally and warmly applauded, so gently admonished—so kindly entreated to look more heedfully to his opinions. He took the praise, as usual, and rejected the advice. As he grew in fame and authority, he aggravated all his offences—clung more fondly to all he had been reproached with—and only took leave of *Childe Harold* to ally himself to *Don Juan*! That he has since been talked of, in public and in private, with less unmingled admiration—that his name is now mentioned as often for censure as for praise—and that the exultation with which his countrymen once hailed the greatest of our living poets, is now alloyed by the recollection of the tendency of his writings—is matter of notoriety to all the world; but matter of surprise, we should imagine, to nobody but Lord Byron himself.

He would fain persuade himself, indeed, that for this decline of his popularity,—or rather this stain upon its lustre—for he is still popular beyond all other example—and it is only because he is so that we feel any interest in this discussion,—he is indebted, not to any actual demerits of his own, but to the jealousy of those he has supplanted, the envy of those he has outshone, or the party rancour of those against whose corruptions he has testified; while, at other times, he seems inclined to insinuate that it is chiefly because he is a *Gentleman* and a *Nobleman* that plebeian censors have conspired to bear him down! We scarcely think, however, that these theories will pass with Lord Byron himself—we are sure they will pass with no other person. They are so manifestly inconsistent, as mutually to destroy each other—and so weak, as to be quite insufficient to account for the

fact, even if they could be effectually combined for that purpose. *The party* that Lord Byron has chiefly offended, bears no malice to Lords and Gentlemen. Against its rancour, on the contrary, these qualities have undoubtedly been his best protection ; and had it not been for them, he may be assured that he would, long ere now, have been shown up in the pages of the *Quarterly*, with the same candour and liberality that has there been exercised towards his friend Lady Morgan. That the base and the bigoted—those whom he has darkened by his glory, spited by his talent, or mortified by his neglect—have taken advantage of the prevailing disaffection, to vent their puny malice in silly nicknames and vulgar scurrility, is natural and true. But Lord Byron may depend upon it that the dissatisfaction is not confined to them—and, indeed, that they would never have had the courage to assail one so immeasurably their superior, if he had not at once made himself vulnerable by his errors, and alienated his natural defenders by his obstinate adherence to them. *We* are not bigots or rival poets. We have not been detractors from Lord Byron's fame, nor the friends of his detractors ; and *we* tell him—far more in sorrow than in anger—that we verily believe the great body of the English nation—the religious, the moral, and the candid part of it—consider the tendency of his writings to be immoral and pernicious—and look upon his perseverance in that strain of composition with regret and reprehension.

He has no priestlike cant or priestlike reviling to apprehend from us. We do not charge him with being either a disciple or an apostle of Satan ; nor do we describe his poetry as a mere compound of blasphemy and obscenity. On the contrary, we are inclined to believe that he wishes well to the happi-

ness of mankind—and are glad to testify that his poems abound with sentiments of great dignity and tenderness, as well as passages of infinite sublimity and beauty. But their general tendency we believe to be in the highest degree pernicious; and we even think that it is chiefly by means of the fine and lofty sentiments they contain, that they acquire their most fatal power of corruption. This may sound at first, perhaps, like a paradox; but we are mistaken if we shall not make it intelligible enough in the end.

We think there are indecencies and indelicacies, seductive descriptions and profligate representations, which are extremely reprehensible; and also audacious speculations, and erroneous and uncharitable assertions, equally indefensible. But if these had stood alone, and if the whole body of his works had been made up of gaudy ribaldry and flashy scepticism, the mischief, we think, would have been much less than it is. He is not more obscene, perhaps, than Dryden or Prior, and other classical and pardoned writers; nor is there any passage in the history even of Don Juan, so offensively degrading as Tom Jones's affair with Lady Bellaston. It is no doubt a wretched apology for the indecencies of a man of genius, that equal indecencies have been forgiven to his predecessors: but the precedent of lenity might have been followed; and we might have passed both the levity and the voluptuousness—the dangerous warmth of his romantic situations, and the scandal of his cold-blooded dissipation. It might not have been so easy to get over his dogmatic scepticism—his hard-hearted maxims of misanthropy—his cold-blooded and eager expositions of the non-existence of virtue and honour. Even this, however, might have been comparatively harmless, if it had not been accompanied by that

which may look, at first sight, as a palliation—the frequent presentment of the most touching pictures of tenderness, generosity, and faith.

The charge we bring against Lord Byron, in short, is, that his writings have a tendency to destroy all belief in the reality of virtue—and to make all enthusiasm and constancy of affection ridiculous ; and this not so much by direct maxims and examples, of an imposing or seducing kind, as by the constant exhibition of the most profligate heartlessness in the persons who had been transiently represented as actuated by the purest and most exalted emotions—and in the lessons of that very teacher who had been, but a moment before, so beautifully pathetic in the expression of the loftiest conceptions. When a gay voluptuary descants, somewhat too freely, on the intoxications of love and wine, we ascribe his excesses to the effervescence of youthful spirits, and do not consider him as seriously impeaching either the value or the reality of the severer virtues ; and in the same way, when the satirist deals out his sarcasms against the sincerity of human professions, and unmasks the secret infirmities of our bosoms, we consider this as aimed at hypocrisy, and not at mankind : or, at all events, and in either case, we consider the Sensualist and the Misanthrope as wandering, each in his own delusion—and are contented to pity those who have never known the charms of a tender or generous affection. The true antidote to such seductive or revolting views of human nature, is to turn to the scenes of its nobleness and attraction ; and to reconcile ourselves again to our kind, by listening to the accents of pure affection and incorruptible honour. But if those accents have flowed in all their sweetness, from the very lips that instantly open again to mock and blaspheme them, the antidote is mingled with the

poison, and the draught is the more deadly for the mixture!

The reveller may pursue his orgies, and the wanton display her enchantments, with comparative safety to those around them, as long as they know or believe that there are purer and higher enjoyments, and teachers and followers of a happier way. But if the Priest pass from the altar, with persuasive exhortations to peace and purity still trembling on his tongue, to join familiarly in the grossest and most profane debauchery—if the Matron, who has charmed all hearts by the lovely sanctimonies of her conjugal and maternal endearments, glides out from the circle of her children, and gives bold and shameless way to the most abandoned and degrading vices—our notions of right and wrong are at once confounded—our confidence in virtue shaken to the foundation—and our reliance on truth and fidelity at an end for ever.

*This* is the charge which we bring against Lord Byron. We say that, under some strange misapprehension as to the truth, and the duty of proclaiming it, he has exerted all the powers of his powerful mind to convince his readers, both directly and indirectly, that all ennobling pursuits, and disinterested virtues, are mere deceits or illusions—hollow and despicable mockeries for the most part, and, at best, but laborious follies. Religion, love, patriotism, valour, devotion, constancy, ambition—all are to be laughed at, disbelieved in, and despised!—and nothing is really good, so far as we can gather, but a succession of dangers to stir the blood, and of banquets and intrigues to sooth it again! If this doctrine stood alone, with its examples, it would revolt, we believe, more than it would seduce: but the author of it has the unlucky gift of personating all those sweet and lofty illusions, and that with such grace and force,

and truth to nature, that it is impossible not to suppose, for the time, that he is among the most devoted of their votaries—till he casts off the character with a jerk—and, the moment after he has moved and exalted us to the very height of our conception, resumes his mockery at all things serious or sublime—and lets us down at once on some coarse joke, hard-hearted sarcasm, or fierce and relentless personality—as if on purpose to show

Whoe'er was edified, himself was not—

or to demonstrate practically as it were, and by example, how possible it is to have all fine and noble feelings, or their appearance, for a moment, and yet retain no particle of respect for them—or of belief in their intrinsic worth or permanent reality. Thus, we have an indelicate but very clever scene of young Juan's concealment in the bed of an amorous matron, and of the torrent of 'rattling and audacious eloquence' with which she repels the too just suspicions of her jealous lord. All this is merely comic and a little coarse:—but then the poet chooses to make this shameless and abandoned woman address to her young gallant an epistle breathing the very spirit of warm, devoted, pure, and unalterable love—thus profaning the holiest language of the heart, and indirectly associating it with the most hateful and degrading sensuality. In like manner, the sublime and terrific description of the shipwreck is strangely and disgustingly broken by traits of low humour and buffoonery;—and we pass immediately from the moans of an agonizing father fainting over his famished son, to facetious stories of Juan's begging a paw of his father's dog—and refusing a slice of his tutor!—as if it were a fine thing to be hard-hearted—and pity and compassion were fit only to be laughed at. In the same

spirit, the glorious Ode on the aspirations of Greece after Liberty is instantly followed up by a strain of dull and cold-blooded ribaldry; and we are hurried on from the distraction and death of Haidee to merry scenes of intrigue and masquerading in the seraglio. Thus all good feelings are excited only to accustom us to their speedy and complete extinction; and we are brought back, from their transient and theatrical exhibition, to the staple and substantial doctrine of the work—the non-existence of constancy in women or honour in men, and the folly of expecting to meet with any such virtues, or of cultivating them, for an undeserving world;—and all this mixed up with so much wit and cleverness, and knowledge of human nature, as to make it irresistibly pleasant and plausible—while there is not only no antidote supplied, but every thing that might have operated in that way has been anticipated, and presented already in as strong and engaging a form as possible—but under such associations as to rob it of all efficacy, or even turn it into an auxiliary of the poison.

This is our sincere opinion of much of Lord Byron's most splendid poetry—a little exaggerated perhaps in the expression, from a desire to make our exposition clear and impressive—but, in substance, we think merited and correct. We have already said, and we deliberately repeat, that we have no notion that Lord Byron had any mischievous intention in these publications—and readily acquit him of any wish to corrupt the morals, or impair the happiness of his readers. Such a wish, indeed, is in itself altogether inconceivable; but it is our duty, nevertheless, to say that much of what he has published appears to us to have this tendency—and that we are acquainted with no writings so well calculated to extinguish in young minds all generous enthusiasm and gentle

affection—all respect for themselves, and all love for their kind—to make them practise and profess hardily what it teaches them to suspect in others—and actually to persuade them that it is wise and manly and knowing to laugh, not only at self-denial and restraint, but at all aspiring ambition, and all warm and constant affection.

How opposite to this is the system, or the temper, of the great author of *Waverley*—the only living individual to whom Lord Byron must submit to be ranked as inferior in genius—and still more deplorably inferior in all that makes genius either amiable in itself, or useful to society! With all his unrivalled power of invention and judgement, of pathos and pleasantry, the tenor of his sentiments is uniformly generous, indulgent, and good-humoured; and so remote from the bitterness of misanthropy, that he never indulges in sarcasm, and scarcely, in any case, carries his merriment so far as derision. But the peculiarity by which he stands most broadly and proudly distinguished from Lord Byron is, that, beginning, as he frequently does, with some ludicrous or satirical theme, he never fails to raise out of it some feelings of a generous or gentle kind, and to end by exciting our tender pity, or deep respect, for those very individuals or classes of persons who seemed at first to be brought on the stage for our mere sport and amusement—thus making the ludicrous itself subservient to the cause of benevolence—and inculcating, at every turn, and as the true end and result of all his trials and experiments, the love of our kind, and the duty and delight of a cordial and genuine sympathy with the joys and sorrows of every condition of men. It seems to be Lord Byron's way, on the contrary, never to excite a kind or a noble sentiment, without making haste to obliterate

it by a torrent of unfeeling mockery or relentless abuse, and taking pains to show how well those passing fantasies may be reconciled to a system of resolute misanthropy, or so managed as even to enhance its merits, or confirm its truth. With what different sensations, accordingly, do we read the works of those two great writers !—With the one, we seem to share a gay and gorgeous banquet—with the other, a wild and dangerous intoxication. Let Lord Byron bethink him of this contrast—and its causes and effects. Though he scorns the precepts, and defies the censure of ordinary men, he may yet be moved by *the example* of his only superior !—In the mean time, we have endeavoured to point out the canker that stains the splendid flowers of his poetry—or, rather, the serpent that lurks beneath them. If it will not listen to the voice of the charmer, that brilliant garden, gay and glorious as it is, must be deserted, and its existence deplored, as a snare to the unwary.

[Jeffrey reviewed *Childe Harold* I (February, 1812), *The Giaour* (July, 1813), *The Corsair* and *The Bride of Abydos* (April, 1814), *Childe Harold* III, &c. (December, 1816), *Manfred* (August, 1817), *Beppo* (February, 1818), *Marino Faliero* (July, 1821), and *Sardanapalus*, &c. (February, 1822).

The review of *Hours of Idleness* (January, 1808) was by Brougham. No notice was taken of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Jeffrey's first words in criticism of Byron were 'Lord Byron has improved marvellously since his last appearance at our tribunal'; and from this time Byron gradually acquired a deep and lasting admiration of Jeffrey's magnanimity. In a letter to Jeffrey (February 28, 1815) he writes, 'I shall be now most happy to obtain and preserve whatever portion of your regard you may allot to me. The whole of your conduct to me has already secured mine.' (*Life*, by Cockburn, i. 416.)

In the article on *Sardanapalus* Jeffrey, in his own words, 'at last administered a little cruel medicine' (letter to Charles Wilkes, April 13, 1822: *Life*, ii. 200). But Byron kept his promise never to say anything against Jeffrey, whom he had come to regard as his 'grand patron'. His reply is in *Don Juan* X. xi–xvii, XII. xvi.]

# JOHN KEATS

(August, 1820.)

1. *Endymion: a Poetic Romance.* By John Keats. 8vo, pp. 207. London, 1818.
2. *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and other Poems.* By John Keats, *author of 'Endymion.'* 12mo, pp. 200. London, 1820[1].

We had never happened to see either of these volumes till very lately—and have been exceedingly struck with the genius they display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagance. That imitation of our old writers, and especially of our older dramatists, to which we cannot help flattering ourselves that we have somewhat contributed, has brought on, as it were, a second spring in our poetry; —and few of its blossoms are either more profuse of sweetness, or richer in promise, than this which is now before us. Mr. Keats, we understand, is still a very young man; and his whole works, indeed, bear evidence enough of the fact. They are full of extravagance and irregularity, rash attempts at originality, interminable wanderings, and excessive obscurity. They manifestly require, therefore, all the indulgence

[1] I still think that a poet of great power and promise was lost to us by the premature death of Keats, in the twenty-fifth year of his age; and regret that I did not go more largely into the exposition of his merits, in the slight notice of them which I now venture to reprint. But though I cannot, with propriety, or without departing from the principle which must govern this republication, now supply this omission, I hope to be forgiven for having added a page or two to *the citations*—by which my opinion of those merits was then illustrated, and is again left to the judgement of the reader.

that can be claimed for a first attempt. But we think it no less plain that they deserve it: for they are flushed all over with the rich lights of fancy; and so coloured and bestrewn with the flowers of poetry, that even while perplexed and bewildered in their labyrinths, it is impossible to resist the intoxication of their sweetness, or to shut our hearts to the enchantments they so lavishly present. The models upon which he has formed himself, in the *Endymion*, the earliest and by much the most considerable of his poems, are obviously *The Faithful Shepherdess* of Fletcher, and *The Sad Shepherd* of Ben Jonson;—the exquisite metres and inspired diction of which he has copied with great boldness and fidelity—and, like his great originals, has also contrived to impart to the whole piece that true rural and poetical air—which breathes only in them and in Theocritus—which is at once homely and majestic, luxurious and rude, and sets before us the genuine sights and sounds and smells of the country, with all the magic and grace of Elysium. His subject has the disadvantage of being mythological; and in this respect, as well as on account of the raised and rapturous tone it consequently assumes, his poem, it may be thought, would be better compared to the *Comus* and the *Arcades* of Milton, of which, also, there are many traces of imitation. The great distinction, however, between him and these divine authors, is, that imagination in them is subordinate to reason and judgement, while, with him, it is paramount and supreme—that their ornaments and images are employed to embellish and recommend just sentiments, engaging incidents, and natural characters, while his are poured out without measure or restraint, and with no apparent design but to unburden the breast of the author, and give vent to the overflowing vein of

his fancy. The thin and scanty tissue of his story is merely the light framework on which his florid wreaths are suspended; and while his imaginations go rambling and entangling themselves every where, like wild honeysuckles, all idea of sober reason, and plan, and consistency, is utterly forgotten, and 'strangled in their waste fertility'. A great part of the work, indeed, is written in the strangest and most fantastical manner that can be imagined. It seems as if the author had ventured every thing that occurred to him in the shape of a glittering image or striking expression—taken the first word that presented itself to make up a rhyme, and then made that word the germ of a new cluster of images—a hint for a new excursion of the fancy—and so wandered on, equally forgetful whence he came, and heedless whither he was going, till he had covered his pages with an interminable arabesque of connected and incongruous figures, that multiplied as they extended, and were only harmonized by the brightness of their tints, and the graces of their forms. In this rash and headlong career he has of course many lapses and failures. There is no work, accordingly, from which a malicious critic could cull more matter for ridicule, or select more obscure, unnatural, or absurd passages. But we do not take *that* to be our office; and must beg leave, on the contrary, to say that any one who, on this account, would represent the whole poem as despicable, must either have no notion of poetry, or no regard to truth.

It is, in truth, at least as full of genius as of absurdity; and he who does not find a great deal in it to admire and to give delight, cannot in his heart see much beauty in the two exquisite dramas to which we have already alluded; or find any great pleasure in some of the finest creations of Milton and Shake-

speare. There are very many such persons, we verily believe, even among the reading and judicious part of the community—correct scholars, we have no doubt, many of them, and, it may be, very classical composers in prose and in verse—but utterly ignorant, on our view of the matter, of the true genius of English poetry, and incapable of estimating its appropriate and most exquisite beauties. With that spirit we have no hesitation in saying that Mr. Keats is deeply imbued—and of those beauties he has presented us with many striking examples. We are very much inclined indeed to add, that we do not know any book which we would sooner employ as a test to ascertain whether any one had in him a native relish for poetry, and a genuine sensibility to its intrinsic charm. The greater and more distinguished poets of our country have so much in them to gratify other tastes and propensities, that they are pretty sure to captivate and amuse those to whom their poetry may be but an hindrance and obstruction, as well as those to whom it constitutes their chief attraction. The interest of the stories they tell—the vivacity of the characters they delineate—the weight and force of the maxims and sentiments in which they abound—the very pathos and wit and humour they display, which may all and each of them exist apart from their poetry, and independent of it, are quite sufficient to account for their popularity, without referring much to that still higher gift, by which they subdue to their enchantments those whose souls are truly attuned to the finer impulses of poetry. It is only, therefore, where those other recommendations are wanting, or exist in a weaker degree, that the true force of the attraction, exercised by the pure poetry with which they are so often combined, can be fairly appreciated: where, without much incident or many characters,

and with little wit, wisdom, or arrangement, a number of bright pictures are presented to the imagination, and a fine feeling expressed of those mysterious relations by which visible external things are assimilated with inward thoughts and emotions, and become the images and exponents of all passions and affections. To an unpoetical reader, such passages will generally appear mere raving and absurdity—and to this censure a very great part of the volumes before us will certainly be exposed, with this class of readers. Even in the judgement of a fitter audience, however, it must, we fear, be admitted, that, besides the riot and extravagance of his fancy, the scope and substance of Mr. Keats's poetry is rather too dreamy and abstracted to excite the strongest interest, or to sustain the attention through a work of any great compass or extent. He deals too much with shadowy and incomprehensible beings, and is too constantly rapt into an extramundane Elysium, to command a lasting interest with ordinary mortals—and must employ the agency of more varied and coarser emotions, if he wishes to take rank with the enduring poets of this or of former generations. There is something very curious, too, we think, in the way in which he, and Mr. Barry Cornwall also, have dealt with the Pagan mythology, of which they have made so much use in their poetry. Instead of presenting its imaginary persons under the trite and vulgar traits that belong to them in the ordinary systems, little more is borrowed from these than the general conception of their condition and relations ; and an original character and distinct individuality is then bestowed upon them, which has all the merit of invention, and all the grace and attraction of the fictions on which it is engrafted. The ancients, though they probably did not stand in any great awe of their deities, have yet

abstained very much from any minute or dramatic representation of their feelings and affections. In Hesiod and Homer they are broadly delineated by some of their actions and adventures, and introduced to us merely as the agents in those particular transactions; while in the Hymns, from those ascribed to Orpheus and Homer, down to those of Callimachus, we have little but pompous epithets and invocations, with a flattering commemoration of their most famous exploits—and are never allowed to enter into their bosoms, or follow out the train of their feelings, with the presumption of our human sympathy. Except the love-song of the Cyclops to his Sea Nymph in Theocritus—the Lamentation of Venus for Adonis in Moschus—and the more recent Legend of Apuleius, we scarcely recollect a passage in all the writings of antiquity in which the passions of an immortal are fairly disclosed to the scrutiny and observation of men. The author before us, however, and some of his contemporaries, have dealt differently with the subject;—and, sheltering the violence of the fiction under the ancient traditionary fable, have in reality created and imagined an entire new set of characters; and brought closely and minutely before us the loves and sorrows and perplexities of beings, with whose names and supernatural attributes we had long been familiar, without any sense or feeling of their personal character. We have more than doubts of the fitness of such personages to maintain a permanent interest with the modern public;—but the way in which they are here managed certainly gives them the best chance that now remains for them; and, at all events, it cannot be denied that the effect is striking and graceful. But we must now proceed to our extracts.

The first of the volumes before us is occupied with the loves of Endymion and Diana—which it would

not be very easy, and which we do not at all intend to analyse in detail.[1] . . .

There is a fragment of a projected Epic, entitled *Hyperion*, on the expulsion of Saturn and the Titanian deities by Jupiter and his younger adherents, of which we cannot advise the completion : for, though there are passages of some force and grandeur, it is sufficiently obvious, from the specimen before us, that the subject is too far removed from all the sources of human interest, to be successfully treated by any modern author. Mr. Keats has unquestionably a very beautiful imagination, a perfect ear for harmony, and a great familiarity with the finest diction of English poetry ; but he must learn not to misuse or misapply these advantages ; and neither to waste the good gifts of Nature and study on intractable themes, nor to luxuriate too recklessly on such as are more suitable.

[1 The account of *Endymion* left Jeffrey 'room to say but little of the second volume'. He deals at greatest length with *The Eve of St. Agnes*: 'the glory and charm of the poem is in the description of the fair maiden's antique chamber, and of all that passes in that sweet and angel-guarded sanctuary: every part of which is touched with colours at once rich and delicate—and the whole chastened and harmonised, in the midst of its gorgeous distinctness, by a pervading grace and purity, that indicate not less clearly the exaltation than the refinement of the author's fancy'. Of the ode *To Autumn* he says, 'we know nothing at once so truly fresh, genuine, and English,—and at the same time so full of poetical feeling, and Greek elegance and simplicity.' These two passages, with the citations which accompany them, were added in the republication. He added also the words 'a perfect ear for harmony' in the last paragraph.

This was the first article in the *Edinburgh* on Keats, who had been disappointed by its silence. In his letter of September 18, 1819, to George Keats, he had said that 'the cowardliness of the *Edinburgh* is more than the abuse of the *Quarterly*.']

# MADAME DE STAËL ON ENGLISH LITERATURE

(February, 1813.)

*De la Littérature considérée dans ses Rapports avec les Institutions Sociales.* Par Mad. de Staël-Holstein. Avec un Précis de la Vie et les Écrits de l'Auteur. 2 tomes, 12mo, pp. 600. London, 1812.

. . . The great fault which the French impute to the writers of the North, is want of taste and politeness. They generally admit that they have genius; but contend that they do not know how to use it; while their partisans maintain that what is called want of taste is merely excess of genius, and independence of pedantic rules and authorities. Madame de Staël, though admitting the transcendent merits of some of the English writers, takes part, upon the whole, against them in this controversy; and, after professing her unqualified preference of a piece compounded of great blemishes and great beauties, compared with one free of faults, but distinguished by little excellence, proceeds very wisely to remark that it would be still better if the great faults were corrected —and that it is but a bad species of independence which manifests itself by being occasionally offensive: and then she attacks Shakespeare, as usual, for interspersing so many puerilities and absurdities and *grossièretés* with his sublime and pathetic passages.

Now, there is no denying that a poem would be better without faults; and that judicious painters use shades

only to set off their pictures, and not blots. But there are two little remarks to be made. In the *first* place, if it be true that an extreme horror at faults is usually found to exclude a variety of beauties, and that a poet can scarcely ever attain the higher excellencies of his art, without some degree of that rash and headlong confidence which naturally gives rise to blemishes and excesses, it may not be quite so absurd to hold that this temperament and disposition, with all its hazards, deserves encouragement, and to speak with indulgence of faults that are symptomatic of great beauties. There is a primitive fertility of soil that naturally throws out weeds along with the matchless crops which it alone can bear; and we might reasonably grudge to reduce its vigour for the sake of purifying its produce. There are certain savage virtues that can scarcely exist in perfection in a state of complete civilization; and, as specimens at least, we may wish to preserve, and be allowed to admire them, with all their exceptionable accompaniments. It is easy to say that there is no necessary connexion between the faults and the beauties of our great dramatist: but *the fact* is that since men have become afraid of falling into his faults, no one has approached to his beauties: and we have already endeavoured, on more than one occasion, to explain the grounds of this connexion.

But our *second* remark is that it is not quite fair to represent the controversy as arising altogether from the excessive and undue indulgence of the English for the admitted faults of their favourite authors, and their persisting to idolize Shakespeare in spite of his buffooneries, extravagancies, and bombast. We admit that he has those faults; and, as they are faults, that he would be better without them: but there are many more things which the French

call faults, but which we deliberately consider as beauties. And here, we suspect, the dispute does not admit of any settlement: because both parties, if they are really sincere in their opinion, and understand the subject of discussion, may very well be right, and for that very reason incapable of coming to any agreement. We consider taste to mean merely the faculty of receiving pleasure from beauty, and, so far as relates to the person *receiving* that pleasure, we apprehend it to admit of little doubt, that the best taste is that which enables him to receive the greatest quantity of pleasure from the greatest number of things. With regard to the author again, or artist of any other description, who pretends to *bestow* the pleasure, his object of course should be to give as much, and to as many persons as possible; and especially to those who, from their rank and education, are likely to regulate the judgement of the remainder. It is his business, therefore, to ascertain what does please the greater part of such persons; and to fashion his productions according to the rules of taste which may be deduced from that discovery. Now, we humbly conceive it to be a complete and final justification for the whole body of the English nation who understand French as well as English, and yet prefer Shakespeare to Racine, just to state, modestly and firmly, the fact of that preference; and to declare that their habits and tempers, and studies and occupations, have been such as to make them receive far greater pleasure from the more varied imagery—the more flexible tone—the closer imitation of nature—the more rapid succession of incident, and vehement bursts of passion of the English author, than from the unvarying majesty—the elaborate argument—and epigrammatic poetry of the French dramatist. For the taste of the nation at large, we

really cannot conceive that any other apology can be necessary; and though it might be very desirable that they should agree with their neighbours upon this point, as well as upon many others, we can scarcely imagine any upon which their disagreement could be attended with less inconvenience. For the authors, again, that have the misfortune not to be so much admired by the adjoining nations as by their own countrymen, we can only suggest that this is a very common misfortune; and that, as they wrote in the language of their country, and will probably be always most read within its limits, it was not perhaps altogether unwise or unpardonable in them to accommodate themselves to the taste which was there established. . . .

Madame de Staël thinks very poorly of our talent for pleasantry; and is not very successful in her delineation of what we call humour. The greater part of the nation, she says, lives either in the serious occupations of business and politics, or in the tranquil circle of family affection. What is called society, therefore, has scarcely any existence among them; and yet it is in that sphere of idleness and frivolity, that taste is matured, and gaiety made elegant. They are not at all trained, therefore, to observe the finer shades of character and of ridicule in real life; and consequently neither think of delineating them in their compositions, nor are aware of their merit when delineated by others. We are unwilling to think this perfectly just; and are encouraged to suspect that the judgement of the ingenious author may not be altogether without appeal on such a subject, by observing that she represents the paltry flippancy and disgusting affectation of Sterne, as the purest specimen of true English humour; and classes the character of Falstaff along with that of *Pistol*, as

parallel instances of that vulgar caricature from which the English still condescend to receive amusement. It is more just, however, to observe, that the humour, and in general the pleasantry, of our nation, has very frequently a sarcastic and even misanthropic character, which distinguishes it from the mere playfulness and constitutional gaiety of our French neighbours; and that we have not, for the most part, succeeded in our attempts to imitate the graceful pleasantry and agreeable trifling of that ingenious people. We develop every thing, she maintains, a great deal too laboriously; and give a harsh and painful colouring to those parts which the very nature of their style requires to be but lightly touched and delicately shaded. We never think we are heard, unless we cry out—nor understood, if we leave anything untold: an excess of diffuseness and labour which could never be endured out of our own island. It is curious enough, indeed, to observe, that men who have nothing to do with their time but to get rid of it in amusement, are always much more impatient of any kind of tediousness in their entertainers, than those who have but little leisure for entertainment. The reason is, we suppose, that familiarity with business makes the latter habitually tolerant of tediousness; while the less engrossing pursuits of the former, in order to retain any degree of interest, require a very rapid succession and constant variety. On the whole, we do not think Madame de Staël very correct in her notions of English gaiety; and cannot help suspecting that she must have been in some respects unfortunate in her society, during her visit to this country.

Her estimate of our poetry, and our works of fiction, is more unexceptionable. She does not allow us much invention, in the strictest sense of that word; and

still less grace and sprightliness in works of a light and playful character: but for glowing descriptions of nature—for the pure language of the affections—for profound thought and lofty sentiment, she admits that the greater poets of England are superior to any thing else that the world has yet exhibited. Milton, Young, Thomson, Goldsmith, and Gray seem to be her chief favourites. We do not find that Cowper, or any later author, had come to her knowledge. The best of them, however, she says, are chargeable with the national faults of exaggeration, and '*des longueurs*'. She overrates the merit, we think, of our novels, when she says that with the exception of *La Nouvelle Heloïse*, which belongs exclusively to the genius of the singular individual who produced it, and has no relation to the character of his nation, all the novels that have succeeded in France have been undisguised imitations of the English, to whom she ascribes, without qualification, the honour of that meritorious invention.

The last chapter upon English literature relates to their philosophy and eloquence; and here, though the learned author seems aware of the transcendent merit of Bacon, we rather think she proves herself to be unacquainted with that of his illustrious contemporaries or immediate successors, Hooker, Taylor, and Barrow—for she places Bacon as the only luminary of our sphere in the period preceding the Usurpation, and considers the true era of British philosophy as commencing with the reign of King William. We cannot admit the accuracy of this intellectual chronology. The character of the English philosophy is to be patient, profound, and always guided by a view to utility. They have done wonders in the metaphysic of the understanding, but have not equalled De Retz, La Bruyère, or even

Montaigne, in their analysis of the passions and dispositions. . . .

She returns again, however, to her former imputation of '*longueurs*', and repetitions, and excessive development; and maintains, that the greater part of English books are obscure, in consequence of their prolixity, and of the author's extreme anxiety to be perfectly understood. We suspect a part of the confusion is owing to her want of familiarity with the language. In point of fact, we know of no French writer on similar subjects so concise as Hume or Smith; and believe we might retort the charge of *longueurs*, in the name of the whole English nation, upon one half of the French classic authors—upon their Rollin and their Massillon—their D'Alembert—their Buffon—their Helvétius—and the whole tribe of their dramatic writers:—while as to repetitions, we are quite certain that there is no one English author who has repeated the same ideas half so often as Voltaire himself—certainly not the most tedious of the fraternity. She complains also of a want of warmth and animation in our prose writers. And it is true that Addison and Shaftesbury are cold; but the imputation only convinces us the more, that she is unacquainted with the writings of Jeremy Taylor, and that illustrious train of successors which has terminated, we fear, in the person of Burke. Our debates in parliament, she says, are more remarkable for their logic than their rhetoric; and have more in them of sarcasm, than of poetical figure and ornament. And no doubt it is so—and *must* be so—in all the discussions of permanent assemblies, occupied from day to day, and from month to month, with great questions of internal legislation or foreign policy. If she had heard Fox or Pitt, however, or Burke or Windham, or Grattan, we cannot conceive that she should complain

of our want of animation ; and, warm as she is in her encomiums on the eloquence of Mirabeau, and some of the orators of the first revolution, she is forced to confess that our system of eloquence is better calculated for the detection of sophistry, and the effectual enforcement of all salutary truth. We really are not aware of any other purposes which eloquence can serve in a great national assembly.

# 'WILHELM MEISTER'

(August, 1825.)

*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship: a Novel.* From the German of Goethe. 3 vols. 12mo, pp. 1030. Edinburgh, 1824.

There are few things that at first sight appear more capricious and unaccountable, than the diversities of national taste; and yet there are not many, that, to a certain extent at least, admit of a clearer explanation. They form evidently a section in the great chapter of National Character: and, proceeding on the assumption that human nature is everywhere fundamentally the same, it is not perhaps very difficult to indicate, in a general way, the circumstances which have distinguished it into so many local varieties.

These may be divided into two great classes,—the one embracing all that relates to the newness or antiquity of the society to which they belong, or, in other words, to the stage which any particular nation has attained in that great progress from rudeness to refinement, in which all are engaged;—the other comprehending what may be termed the accidental causes by which the character and condition of communities may be affected; such as their government, their relative position as to power and civilization to neighbouring countries, their prevailing occupations, determined in some degree by the capabilities of their soil and climate, and more than all perhaps, as to the question of taste, the still more accidental circumstances of the character of their first models of excellence, or the kind of merit by which their admiration and national vanity had first been excited.

It is needless to illustrate these obvious sources of peculiarity at any considerable length. It is not more certain that all primitive communities proceed to civilization by nearly the same stages, than that the progress of taste is marked by corresponding gradations, and may, in most cases, be distinguished into periods, the order and succession of which is nearly as uniform and determined. If tribes of savage men always proceed, under ordinary circumstances, from the occupation of hunting to that of pasturage, from that to agriculture, and from that to commerce and manufactures, the sequence is scarcely less invariable in the history of letters and art. In the former, verse is uniformly antecedent to prose—marvellous legends to correct history—exaggerated sentiments to just representations of nature. Invention, in short, regularly comes before judgement, warmth of feeling before correct reasoning—and splendid declamation and broad humour before delicate simplicity or refined wit. In the arts again, their progress is strictly analogous—from mere monstrosity to ostentatious displays of labour and design, first in massive formality, and next in fantastical minuteness, variety, and flutter of parts—and then, through the gradations of startling contrasts and overwrought expression, to the repose and simplicity of graceful nature.

These considerations alone explain much of that contrariety of taste by which different nations are distinguished. They not only start in the great career of improvement at different times, but they advance in it with different velocities—some lingering longer in one stage than another—some obstructed and some helped forward, by circumstances operating on them from within or from without. It is the unavoidable consequence, however, of their being in any one

particular position, that they will judge of their own productions and those of their neighbours, according to that standard of taste which belongs to the place they then hold in this great circle; and that a whole people will look on their neighbours with wonder and scorn, for admiring what their own grandfathers looked on with equal admiration,—while they themselves are scorned and vilified in return, for tastes which will infallibly be adopted by the grandchildren of those who despise them.

What we have termed the accidental causes of great differences in beings of the same nature, do not of course admit of quite so simple an exposition. But it is not in reality more difficult to prove their existence and explain their operation. Where great and degrading despotisms have been early established, either by the aid of superstition or of mere force, as in most of the states of Asia, or where small tribes of mixed descent have been engaged in perpetual contention for freedom and superiority, as in ancient Greece—where the ambition and faculties of individuals have been chained up by the institution of castes and indelible separations, as in India and Egypt, or where all men practise all occupations and aspire to all honours, as in Germany or Britain—where the sole occupation of the people has been war, as in infant Rome, or where a vast pacific population has been for ages inured to mechanical drudgery, as in China—it is needless to say that very opposite notions of what conduces to delight and amusement must necessarily prevail; and that the Taste of the nation must be affected both by the sentiments which it has been taught to cultivate, and the capacities it has been led to unfold.

The influence of early models, however, is perhaps the most considerable of any; and may be easily

enough understood. When men have been accustomed to any particular kind of excellence, they naturally become good judges of it, and account certain considerable degrees of it indispensable,—while they are comparatively blind to the merit of other good qualities to which they had been less habituated, and are neither offended by their absence, nor at all skilful in their estimation. Thus those nations who, like the English and the Dutch, have been long accustomed to great cleanliness and order in their persons and dwellings, naturally look with admiration on the higher displays of those qualities, and are proportionally disgusted by their neglect; while they are apt to undervalue mere pomp and stateliness, when destitute of these recommendations: and thus also the Italians and Sicilians, bred in the midst of dirt and magnificence, are curiously alive to the beauties of architecture and sculpture, and make but little account of the more homely comforts which are so highly prized by the others. In the same way, if a few of the first successful adventurers in art should have excelled in any particular qualities, the taste of their nation will naturally be moulded on that standard—will regard those qualities almost exclusively as entitled to admiration, and will not only consider the want of them as fatal to all pretensions to excellence, but will unduly despise and undervalue other qualities, in themselves not less valuable, but with which their national models had not happened to make them timeously familiar. If, for example, the first great writers in any country should have distinguished themselves by a pompous and severe regularity, and a certain elaborate simplicity of design and execution, it will naturally follow that the national taste will not only become critical and rigorous as to those particulars, but will be proportionally deadened to the

merit of vivacity, nature, and invention, when combined with irregularity, homeliness, or confusion. While, if the great patriarchs of letters had excelled in variety and rapidity of invention, and boldness and truth of sentiment, though poured out with considerable disorder and incongruity of manner, those qualities would quickly come to be the national criterion of merit, and the correctness and decorum of the other school be despised, as mere recipes for monotony and tameness.

These, we think, are the plain and certain effects of the peculiar character of the first great popular writers of all countries. But still we do not conceive that they depend altogether on any thing so purely accidental as the temperament or early history of a few individuals. No doubt the national taste of France and of England would at this moment have been different, had Shakespeare been a Frenchman, and Boileau and Racine written in English. But then, we do not think that Shakespeare *could* have been a Frenchman; and we conceive that his character, and that of other original writers, though no doubt to be considered on the whole as casual, must yet have been modified to a great extent by the circumstances of the countries in which they were bred. It is plain that no original force of genius could have enabled Shakespeare to write as he had done, if he had been born and bred among the Chinese or the Peruvians. Neither do we think that he could have done so in any other country but England—free, sociable, discursive, reformed, familiar England—whose motley and mingling population not only presented 'every change of many-coloured life' to his eye, but taught and permitted every class, from the highest to the lowest, to know and to estimate the feelings and the habits of all the others—and thus enabled the gifted observer, not only

to deduce the true character of human nature from this infinite variety of experiments and examples, but to speak to the sense and the hearts of each, with that truly universal tongue, which every one feels to be peculiar, and all enjoy as common.

We have said enough, however, or rather too much, on these general views of the subject—which in truth is sufficiently clear in those extreme cases, where the contrariety is great and universal, and is only perplexing when there is a pretty general conformity both in the causes which influence taste and in the results. Thus, we are not at all surprised to find the taste of the Japanese or the Iroquois very different from our own—and have no difficulty in both admitting that our human nature and human capacities are substantially the same, and in referring this discrepancy to the contrast that exists in the whole state of society, and the knowledge, and the opposite qualities of the objects to which we have been respectively accustomed to give our admiration. That nations living in times or places altogether remote should disagree in taste, as in every thing else, seems to us quite natural. They are only the nearer cases that puzzle. And, that great European countries, peopled by the same mixed races, educated in the admiration of the same classical models—venerating the same remains of antiquity—engaged substantially in the same occupations—communicating every day, on business, letters, and society—bound up, in short, in one great commonwealth, as against the inferior and barbarous parts of the world, should yet differ so widely—not only as to the comparative excellence of their respective productions, but as to the constituents of excellence in all works of genius or skill, does indeed sound like a paradox, the solution of which every one may not be able to deduce from the preceding observations.

The great practical equation on which we in this country have been hitherto most frequently employed, has been between our own standard of taste and that which is recognized among our neighbours of France: and certainly, though feelings of rivalry have somewhat aggravated its *apparent*, beyond its real amount, *there is* a great and substantial difference to be accounted for,—in the way we have suggested—or in some other way. Stating that difference as generally as possible, we would say that the French, compared with ourselves, are more sensitive to faults, and less transported with beauties—more enamoured of art, and less indulgent to nature—more charmed with overcoming difficulties, than with that power which makes us unconscious of their existence—more averse to strong emotions, or at least less covetous of them in their intensity—more students of taste, in short, than adorers of genius—and far more disposed than any other people, except perhaps the Chinese, to circumscribe the rules of taste to such as they themselves have been able to practise, and to limit the legitimate empire of genius to the provinces they have explored. There has been a good deal of discussion of late years, in the face of literary Europe, on these debatable grounds; and we cannot but think that the result has been favourable, on the whole, to the English, and that the French have been compelled to recede considerably from many of their exclusive pretensions—a result which we are inclined to ascribe, less to the arguments of our native champions, than to those circumstances in the recent history of Europe, which have compelled our ingenious neighbours to mingle more than they had ever done before with the surrounding nations—and thus to become better acquainted with the diversified forms which genius and talent may assume.

But while we are thus fairly in the way of settling our differences with France, we are little more than beginning them, we fear, with Germany; and the perusal of the extraordinary volumes before us, which has suggested all the preceding reflections, has given us, at the same time, an impression of such radical and apparently irreconcilable disagreement as to principles, as we can scarcely hope either to remove by our reasonings, or even very satisfactorily to account for by our suggestions.

This is allowed, by the general consent of all Germany, to be the very greatest work of their very greatest writer: the most original, the most varied and inventive,—the most characteristic, in short, of the author, and of his country. We receive it as such accordingly, with implicit faith and suitable respect; and have perused it in consequence with very great attention and no common curiosity. We have perused it, indeed, only in the translation of which we have prefixed the title: but it is a translation by a professed admirer; and by one who is proved by his Preface to be a person of talents, and by every part of the work to be no ordinary master, at least of one of the languages with which he has to deal. We need scarcely say that we profess to judge of the work only according to our own principles of judgement and habits of feeling: and, meaning nothing less than to dictate to the readers or the critics of Germany what they should think of their favourite authors, propose only to let them know, in all plainness and modesty, what we, and we really believe most of our countrymen, actually think of this *chef-d'œuvre* of Teutonic genius.

We must say, then, at once, that we cannot enter into the spirit of this German idolatry; nor at all comprehend upon what grounds the work before us

could ever be considered as an admirable or even a commendable performance. To us it certainly appears, after the most deliberate consideration, to be eminently absurd, puerile, incongruous, vulgar, and affected; and, though redeemed by considerable power of invention, and some traits of vivacity, to be so far from perfection, as to be, almost from beginning to end, one flagrant offence against every principle of taste, and every just rule of composition. Though indicating, in many places, a mind capable both of acute and profound reflection, it is full of mere silliness and childish affectation; and though evidently the work of one who had seen and observed much, it is throughout altogether unnatural, and not so properly improbable, as affectedly fantastic and absurd—kept, as it were, studiously aloof from general or ordinary nature—never once bringing us into contact with real life or genuine character—and, where not occupied with the professional squabbles, paltry jargon, and scenical profligacy of strolling players, tumblers, and mummers (which may be said to form its staple), is conversant only with incomprehensible mystics and vulgar men of whim, with whom, if it were at all possible to understand them, it would be a baseness to be acquainted. Every thing, and every body we meet with, is a riddle and an oddity; and though the tissue of the story is sufficiently coarse, and the manners and sentiments infected with a strong tinge of vulgarity, it is all kept in the air, like a piece of machinery at the minor theatres, and never allowed to touch the solid ground, or to give an impression of reality, by the disclosure of known or living features. In the midst of all this, however, there are, every now and then, outbreakings of a fine speculation, and gleams of a warm and sprightly imagination—an occasional wild and exotic glow of fancy and poetry

—a vigorous heaping up of incidents, and touches of bright and powerful description.

It is not very easy certainly to account for these incongruities, or to suggest an intelligible theory for so strange a practice. But in so far as we can guess, these peculiarities of German taste are to be referred, in part, to the comparative newness of original composition among that ingenious people, and to the state of European literature when they first ventured on the experiment—and in part to the state of society in that great country itself, and the comparatively humble condition of the greater part of those who write, or to whom writing is there addressed.

The Germans, though undoubtedly an imaginative and even enthusiastic race, had neglected their native literature for two hundred years—and were chiefly known for their learning and industry. They wrote huge Latin treatises on Law and Theology—and put forth bulky editions and great tomes of annotations on the classics. At last, however, they grew tired of being respected as the learned drudges of Europe, and reproached with their consonants and commentators; and determined, about fifty years ago, to show what metal they were made of, and to give the world a taste of their quality, as men of genius and invention. In this attempt the first thing to be effected was at all events to avoid the imputation of being scholastic imitators of the classics. *That* would have smelt too much, they thought, of the old shop; and in order to prove their claims to originality, it was necessary to go a little into the opposite extreme,—to venture on something decidedly modern, and to show at once their independence on their old masters, and their superiority to the pedantic rules of antiquity. With this view some of them betook themselves to the French models—set seriously to study how to be gay

—*apprendre à être vif*—and composed a variety of *petites pièces*, and novels of polite gallantry, in a style —of which we shall at present say nothing. This manner, however, ran too much counter to the general character of the nation to be very much followed—and undoubtedly the greater and better part of their writers turned rather to us, for hints and lessons to guide them in their ambitious career. There was a greater original affinity in the temper and genius of the two nations—and, in addition to that consideration, our great authors were indisputably at once more original and less classical than those of France. England, however, we are sorry to say, could furnish abundance of bad as well as of good models—and even the best were perilous enough for rash imitators. As it happened, however, the worst were most generally selected—and the worst parts of the good. Shakespeare was admired—but more for his flights of fancy, his daring improprieties, his trespasses on the borders of absurdity, than for the infinite sagacity and rectifying good sense by which he redeemed those extravagancies, or even the profound tenderness and simple pathos which alternated with the lofty soaring or dazzling imagery of his style. Altogether, however, Shakespeare was beyond their rivalry ; and although Schiller has dared, and not ingloriously, to emulate his miracles, it was plainly to other merits and other rivalries that the body of his ingenious countrymen aspired. The ostentatious absurdity—the affected oddity—the pert familiarity—the broken style, and exaggerated sentiment of *Tristram Shandy*—the mawkish morality, dawdling details, and interminable agonies of Richardson—the vulgar adventures, and homely, though, at the same time, fantastical speculations of *John Buncle* and others of his forgotten class, found far more favour in their eyes. They were

original, startling, unclassical, and puzzling. They excited curiosity by not being altogether intelligible —effectually excluded monotony by the rapidity and violence of their transitions, and promised to rouse the most torpid sensibility, by the violence and perseverance with which they thundered at the heart. They were the very things, in short, which the German originals were in search of;—and they were not slow, therefore, in adopting and improving on them. In order to make them thoroughly their own, they had only to exaggerate their peculiarities—to mix up with them a certain allowance of their old visionary philosophy, misty metaphysics, and superstitious visions—and to introduce a few crazy sententious theorists, to sprinkle over the whole a seasoning of rash speculation on morality and the fine arts.

The style was also to be relieved by a variety of odd comparisons and unaccountable similes—borrowed, for the most part, from low and revolting objects, and all the better if they did not exactly fit the subject, or even introduced new perplexity into that which they professed to illustrate.

This goes far, we think, to explain the absurdity, incongruity, and affectation of the works of which we are speaking. But there is yet another distinguishing quality for which we have not accounted—and that is a peculiar kind of vulgarity which pervades all their varieties, and constitutes, perhaps, their most repulsive characteristic. We do not know very well how to describe this unfortunate peculiarity, except by saying that it is the vulgarity of pacific comfortable burghers, occupied with stuffing, cooking, and providing for their coarse personal accommodations. There certainly never were any men of genius who condescended to attend so minutely to the *non-naturals* of their heroes and heroines as the novelists of modern

Germany. Their works smell, as it were, of groceries —of brown papers filled with greasy cakes and slices of bacon,—and fryings in frowsy back parlours. All the interesting recollections of childhood turn on remembered titbits and plunderings of savoury storerooms. In the midst of their most passionate scenes, there is always a serious and affectionate notice of the substantial pleasures of eating and drinking. The raptures of a *tête-à-tête* are not complete without a bottle of nice wine and a 'trim collation'. Their very sages deliver their oracles over a glass of punch; and the enchanted lover finds new apologies for his idolatry in taking a survey of his mistress's 'combs, soap, and towels, with the traces of their use'. These baser necessities of our nature, in short, which all other writers who have aimed at raising the imagination or touching the heart, have kept studiously out of view, are ostentatiously brought forward, and fondly dwelt on by the pathetic authors of Germany.

We really cannot well account for this extraordinary taste. But we suspect it is owing to the importance that is really attached to those solid comforts and supplies of necessaries, by the greater part of the readers and writers of that country. Though there is a great deal of freedom in Germany, it operates less by raising the mass of the people to a potential equality with the nobles, than by securing to them their inferior and plebeian privileges; and consists rather in the immunities of their incorporated tradesmen, which may enable them to become rich as such, than in any general participation of national rights, by which they may aspire to dignity and elegance, as well as opulence and comfort. Now, the writers, as well as the readers in that country, belong almost entirely to the plebeian and vulgar class. Their learned men are almost all wofully poor and de-

pendent; and the comfortable burghers, who buy entertaining books by the thousand at the Frankfort fair, probably agree with their authors in nothing so much as the value they set on those homely comforts to which their ambition is mutually limited by their condition; and enter into no part of them so heartily as those which set forth their paramount and continual importance.

It is time, however, that we should proceed to give some more particular account of the work which has given occasion to all these observations.[1] . . .

Many of the passages to which we have now alluded are executed with great talent; and we are very sensible are better worth extracting than many of those we have cited. But it is too late now to change

[[1] Jeffrey gives many lengthy quotations. 'But we are tired of extracting so much trash, and must look out for something better. Would any one believe that the same work which contains all these *platitudes* of vulgarity should have furnished our great novelist with one of his most fantastical characters, and Lord Byron with one of the most beautiful passages in his poetry? Yet so it is. The character of Fenella, in *Peveril of the Peak*, is borrowed almost entire from the Mignon of the work before us—and the prelude to the *Bride of Abydos*, beginning, "O know you the land where the cypress and myrtle?" is taken, with no improvement, from a little wild air which she sings. It is introduced here, too, with more propriety and effect than in the work of the noble author; for she is represented as having been stolen from Italy; and the song, in this its original form, shadows out her desire to be restored to that delightful land and the stately halls of her ancestors,—retracing her way by the wild passes of the Alps. It is but fair to the poetical powers of Goethe to give this beautiful song, as it is here, apparently, very ably translated.

Know'st thou the land where the lemon-trees bloom?' &c.

He quotes also the 'admirable critique' of Hamlet: 'We come suddenly upon what we do not hesitate to pronounce the most able, eloquent, and profound exposition of the character of Hamlet, as conceived by our great dramatist, that has ever been given to the world. . . . There is nothing so good as this in any of our own commentators—nothing at once so poetical, so feeling, and so just. It is inconceivable that it should have been written by the chronicler of puppet-shows and gluttonous vulgarities.']

our selections—and we can still less afford to add to them. On the whole, we close the book with some feelings of mollification towards its faults, and a disposition to abate, if possible, some part of the censure we were impelled to bestow on it at the beginning. It improves certainly as it advances—and though nowhere probable, or conversant indeed either with natural or conceivable characters, the inventive powers of the author seem to strengthen by exercise, and come gradually to be less frequently employed on childish or revolting subjects. While we hold out the work therefore as a curious and striking instance of that diversity of national tastes, which makes a writer idolized in one part of polished Europe, who could not be tolerated in another, we would be understood as holding it out as an object rather of wonder than of contempt; and though the greater part certainly could not be endured, and indeed could not have been written in England, there are many passages of which any country might reasonably be proud, and which demonstrate, that if taste be local and variable, genius is permanent and universal.

# APPENDIX

## LIST OF JEFFREY'S ARTICLES IN THE EDINBURGH REVIEW

This list was drawn up hastily by Jeffrey and his fellow-judge and biographer, Lord Cockburn. 'He had often been advised,' writes Cockburn, 'to make a list of his own contributions, but though not at all desirous of concealing any of them, he treated it as a matter of indifference, and never would take the trouble. I was glad, therefore, when one day, in December 1840, I found him, on my renewing the proposal, not so averse as he used to be; and we soon sat down, and began with the first number, and in the course of a week or two we went through the whole work, authenticating all his papers. His memory rarely showed its tenacity more strikingly. His recollection of the articles either wholly or partially his, was so assured, that he generally recognized them as soon as he saw the title. If there was a doubt, it was commonly solved by his mentioning, before going further, some fact, or phrase, or metaphor, or striking sentence, or something of this kind, and saying,—"If that be there it is mine." His conjecture was almost always confirmed on reading the article, both by finding the test, and by the general revival of his recollection; so that at last all uncertainty was removed.... He said that there might possibly be one or two mistakes, but that he did not think that there were any' (*Life of Lord Jeffrey*, 1852, i. 285, 6). The list is added as an appendix to Cockburn's first volume.

It will be seen that in making this list Jeffrey relied entirely on his memory. Some passages in his letters printed by Cockburn as the second volume of the *Life*

show that the list is not complete. It was meant to include only the articles of which he was sole author.

An asterisk is here prefixed to the articles which were reprinted by Jeffrey in the collected edition—*Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 4 vols., 1844 (reissued in 3 vols. in 1846; and again in 1 vol., posthumously, in 1853).

1. Mounier sur la Révolution de France.—No. 1, art. 1 (Oct. 1802).
2. Southey's Thalaba.—No. 1, art. 8.
3. Herrenschwand, Adresse aux vrais hommes de bien, &c., &c.—No. 1, art. 13.
4. Bonnet sur l'Art de rendre les Révolutions utiles.—No. 1, art. 19.
5. Mackenzie's Voyages in North America.—No. 1, art. 22.
6. Playfair's Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory.—No. 1, art. 26.
7. Paley's Natural Theology.—No. 2, art. 3 (Jan. 1803).
8. Denon's Travels in Egypt.—No. 2, art. 8.
9. Mrs. Hunter's Poems.—No. 2, art. 14.
10. Gentz, État de l'Europe.—No. 3, art. 1 (Apr. 1803).[1]

*11. Hayley's Life of Cowper, vols. i and ii.—No. 3, art. 5.

12. Thelwall's Poems.—No. 3, art. 21.
13. Miss Baillie's Plays on the Passions.—No. 4, art. 1 (July 1803).[2]
14. Huttonian and Neptunian Geology.—No. 4, art. 5.

*15. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Works.—No. 4, art. 21.

16. De Lille, Malheur et Pitié; Poëme.—No. 5, art. 2 (Oct. 1803).
17. Cambridge's Works.—No. 5, art. 4.
18. Millar's View of the English Government.—No. 5, art. 13.

*19. Stewart's Life of Dr. Reid.—No. 6, art. 1 (Jan. 1804).

20. Pictet, Voyage en Angleterre.—No. 6, art. 2.
21. Dr. Crirrie's Scottish Scenery; a Poem.—No. 6, art. 6.

*22. Bentham, Principes de Législation, par Dumont.—No. 7, art. 1 (Apr. 1804).

[1] 'In No. 3, I do Gentz, Hayley's Cowper, Sir J. Sinclair, and Thelwall' (Letter to John Jeffrey, July 2, 1803; *Life*, ii. 73). No. 3, art. 23, 'Sir John Sinclair's *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*.'

[2] 'In No. 4, which is now printing, I have Miss Baillie's Plays, Comparative View of Geology, Lady Mary Wortley, and some little ones' (*id.*).

23. Holcroft's Travels from Hamburgh to Paris.—No. 7, art. 6.
*24. Hayley's Life of Cowper, vol. iii.—No. 8, art. 2 (July 1804).
25. Sotheby's Translation of the Georgics.—No. 8, art. 4.
26. Considerations on the Abolition of the Slave Trade.—No. 8, art. 17.
*27. Richardson's Life and Correspondence.—No. 9, art. 2 (Oct. 1804).
28. Barrow's Travels in China.—No. 10, art. 1 (Jan. 1805).
29. Lord Teignmouth's Life of Sir W. Jones.—No. 10, art. 6.
30. Miss Baillie's Miscellaneous Plays.—No. 10, art. 12.
31. The Sabbath ; a Poem.—No. 10, art. 14.
32. Correspondence and Life of John Wilkes.—No. 10, art. 18.
*33. Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel.—No. 11, art. 1 (Apr. 1805.)
*34. Mémoires de Bailly.—No. 11, art. 12.
35. Southey's Madoc ; a Poem.—No. 13, art. 1 (Oct. 1805).
36. De Lille, Traduction de l'Énéide.—No. 13, art. 8.
*37. Drummond's Academical Questions.—No. 13, art. 12.
38. Mémoires de Marmontel.—No. 14, art. 5 (Jan. 1806).
39. Forsyth's Principles of Moral Science.—No. 14, art. 7.
40. The Frauds of the Neutral Flags.—No. 15, art. 1 (Apr. 1806).
*41. Cumberland's Memoirs.—No. 15, art. 8.
42. Lessing's Nathan the Wise.—No. 15, art. 11.
43. Smyth's English Lyrics.—No. 15, art. 11.
44. Raymond's Life of Dermody.—No. 15, art. 13.
45. Miss Edgeworth's Leonora.—No. 15, art. 16.
46. Mawman's Tour through Scotland.—No. 16, art. 4 (July, 1806).
*47. Franklin's Works.—No. 16, art. 7.
48. Bell on the Anatomy of Painting.—No. 16, art. 10.
49. Pinkerton's Recollections of Paris.—No. 16, art. 13.
50. Moore's Poems.—No. 16, art. 18.
51. Barrow's Voyage to Cochinchina.—No. 17, art. 1 (Oct. 1806).
52. Willan and Others on Vaccination.—No. 17, art. 3.
53. Craig's Life of Millar.—No. 17, art. 5.
*54. Memoirs of Dr. Priestley.—No. 17, art. 9.
55. Lord Holland's Account of Lope de Vega.—No. 17, art. 16.
56. Montgomery's Poems.—No. 18, art. 6 (Jan. 1807).
57. Proposed Reform of the Court of Session.—No. 18, art. 14.

58. The Dangers of the Country.—No. 19, art. 1 (Apr. 1807).
*59. Clarkson on Quakerism.—No. 19, art. 6.
*60. Sir William Forbes's Life of Dr. Beattie.—No. 19, art. 12.
61. Sotheby's Saul; a Poem.—No. 19, art. 14.
62. Good's Translation of Lucretius.—No. 19, art. 15.
63. Cobbett's Political Register.—No. 20, art. 9 (July 1807).
64. Hope on Household Furniture.—No. 20, art. 14.
65. Catholic Question.—No. 21, art. 8 (Oct. 1807).
66. Sir John Sinclair, on Health and Longevity.—No. 21, art. 13.
67. Wordsworth's Poems.—No. 21, art. 14.
68. Espriella's Letters from England.—No. 22, art. 7 (Jan. 1808).
69. Scott's Marmion.—No. 23, art. 1 (Apr. 1808).
*70. Crabbe's Poems.—No. 23, art. 8.
*71. Fox's History of James II.—No. 24, art. 1 (July 1808).
72. Mrs. Hamilton's Cottagers of Glenburnie.—No. 24, art. 8.
73. Douce's Illustrations of Shakespeare.—No. 24, art. 12.
*74. The Life of Colonel Hutchinson.—No. 25, art. 1 (Oct. 1808).
75. Fowling; a Poem.—No. 25, art. 4.
76. Curran's Speeches.—No. 25, art. 9.
77. Cevallos on the French Usurpation in Spain.—No. 25, art. 14.[1]
*78. Cromek's Reliques of Burns.—No. 26, art. 1 (Jan. 1809).
*79. Warburton's Letters.—No. 26, art. 5.
*80. Campbell's Gertrude of Wyoming.—No. 27, art. 1 (Apr. 1809).
81. Morehead's Discourses.—No. 27, art. 7.
82. Lettres du Prince de Ligne.—No. 27, art. 9.
83. Parliamentary Reform.—No. 28, art. 1 (July 1809).
*84. Miss Edgeworth's Fashionable Tales.—No. 28, art. 7.
85. Barlow's Columbiad; a Poem.—No. 29, art. 2 (Oct. 1809).
86. Mrs. Montagu's Letters.—No. 29, art. 5.
87. Hamilton's Parliamentary Logic.—No. 29, art. 11.
*88. Memoirs of Alfieri.—No. 30, art. 2 (Jan. 1810).
89. Pamphlets on Vaccination.—No. 30, art. 5.

[1] This article was claimed by Brougham and reprinted in his *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 1856, ii. 207–31, but the evidence shows that it was mainly, though not wholly, by Jeffrey. See *Life*, i. 191; *Journal of Henry Cockburn*, 1874, ii. 279; *Correspondence of Macvey Napier*, 1879, pp. 308, 9; *Brougham and his early Friends*, 1908, ii. 319, 20.

*90. Correspondance de Madame du Deffand et de Mademoiselle de Lespinasse.—No. 30, art. 13.
*91. The State of Parties.—No. 30, art. 15.
92. Letter on the French Government.—No. 31, art. 1 (Apr. 1810).
*93. Crabbe's Borough.—No. 31, art. 2.
94. Grahame's British Georgics.—No. 31, art. 9.
*95. Scott's Lady of the Lake.—No. 32, art. 1 (Aug. 1810).
96. Staunton's Penal Code of China.—No. 32, art. 12.
97. Catholic Question.—No. 33, art. 1 (Nov. 1810).
*98. Stewart's Philosophical Essays.—No. 33, art. 9.
*99. Parliamentary Reform.—No. 34, art. 1 (Feb. 1811).
100. Letters of Madame du Deffand.—No. 34, art. 2.
101. Southey's Curse of Kehama.—No. 34, art. 11.
*102. Alison on Taste.—No. 35, art. 1 (May 1811).
*103. Ford's Dramatic Works.—No. 36, art. 1 (Aug. 1811).
104. Scott's Vision of Don Roderick.—No. 36, art. 6.
105. Mrs. Grant on Highlanders.—No. 36, art. 12.
*106. Hardy's Life of Lord Charlemont.—No. 37, art. 4 (Nov. 1811).
107. Miss Baillie's Plays on the Passions, vol. iii.—No. 38, art. 1 (Feb. 1812).
108. Wilson's Isle of Palms.—No. 38, art. 6.
109. Byron's Childe Harold.—No. 38, art. 10.
110. M'Crie's Life of John Knox.—No. 39, art. 1 (July 1812).
*111. Miss Edgeworth's Tales of Fashionable Life.—No. 39, art. 7.
112. Chenevix's Plays.—No. 39, art. 11.
*113. Mémoires de la Princesse de Bareith.—No. 40, art. 1 (Nov. 1812).
*114. Crabbe's Tales.—No. 40, art. 2.
*115. Leckie on the British Government.—No. 40, art. 4.
*116. Rejected Addresses.—No. 40, art. 10.
*117. Madame de Staël sur la Littérature.—No. 41, art. 1 (Feb. 1813).
*118. Correspondance du Baron de Grimm.—No. 42, art. 1 (July 1813).
119. Byron's Giaour.—No. 42, art. 2.
*120. Clarkson's Life of William Penn.—No. 42, art. 10.[1]

[1] Jeffrey sailed for America in August 1813, to marry his second wife, Charlotte Wilkes, and reached home in February 1814. Hence the break for two numbers in his contributions to the *Review*.

*121. State and Prospects of Europe.—No. 45, art. 1 (Apr. 1814).
122. Byron's Corsair and Bride of Abydos.—No. 45, art. 9.
123. Correspondance du Baron de Grimm.—No. 46, art. 2 (Sept. 1814).
124. Alison's Sermons.—No. 46, art. 9.
*125. Wordsworth's Excursion, a Poem.—No. 47, art. 1 (Nov. 1814).[1]
126. Hogg's Queen's Wake.—No. 47, art. 8.
127. Tennant's Anster Fair.—No. 47, art. 9.
*128. Waverley; a Novel.—No. 47, art. 11.
129. Scott's Lord of the Isles. No. 48, art. 1 (Feb. 1815).
130. The Paradise of Coquettes.—No. 48, art. 8.
*131. Southey's Roderick, the last of the Goths.—No. 49, art. 1 (June 1815).
*132. Wordsworth's White Doe of Rylstone.—No. 50, art. 4 (Oct. 1815).
*133. Mémoires de Madame de Larochejaquelein.—No. 51, art. 1 (Feb. 1816).
134. Southey's Lay of the Laureate.—No. 52, art. 8 (June 1816).
135. Wilson's City of the Plague.—No. 52, art. 10.
136. Hunt's Story of Rimini.—No. 52, art. 11.
*137. Scott's Edition of Swift.—No. 53, art. 1 (Sept. 1816).
*138. Byron's Poetry.—No. 54, art. 1 (Dec. 1816).
139. Wat Tyler and Mr. Southey.—No. 55, art. 7 (Mar. 1817).
*140. Tales of My Landlord.—No. 55, art. 9.
141. Franklin's Correspondence.—No. 56, art. 1 (Aug. 1817).
142. Miss Edgeworth's Tales.—No. 56, art. 6.
*143. Byron's Manfred.—No. 56, art. 7.
*144. Hazlitt on Shakespeare.—No. 56, art. 10.
145. Coleridge's Literary Life.—No. 56, art. 10.[2]
*146. Moore's Lalla Rookh.—No. 57, art. 1 (Nov. 1817).
147. Byron's Beppo.—No. 58, art. 2 (Feb. 1818).

[1] 'In the last number for December I do a great deal, though not very well—Wordsworth, the Scottish poets, Waverley, and America, besides vamping and patching' (*Letter* to Charles Wilkes, Feb. 25, 1815; *Life*, ii. 148). No. 47, art. 12, 'War with America.'

[2] This article is, in part at least, by Hazlitt. The account of Burke reappears in Hazlitt's *Political Essays*, 1819, pp. 264–9. But Jeffrey writes in the first person and signs with his initials the long note in which he replies to Coleridge's attack on him in the *Biographia Literaria*.

*148. Rob Roy.—No. 58, art. 7.
149. Hall's Voyage to Loo-Choo.—No. 58, art. 10.
*150. Madame de Staël sur la Révolution Française.—No. 60, art. 1 (Sept. 1818).
*151. Prison Discipline.—No. 60, art. 9.
*152. Rogers's Human Life; a Poem.—No. 62, art. 4 (Mar. 1819).[1]
*153. Campbell's British Poetry.—No. 62, art. 11.
154. Dr. King's Memoirs.—No. 63, art. 4 (July 1819).
*155. Crabbe's Tales of the Hall.—No. 63, art. 7.
156. State of the Country.—No. 64, art. 2 (Oct. 1819).
*157. Ivanhoe.—No. 65, art. 1 (Jan. 1820).
158. Cornwall's Poems.—No. 65, art. 8.
*159. Life of Curran.—No. 66, art. 1 (May 1820).
*160. Dispositions of England and America.—No. 66, art. 6.
161. Edgeworth's Memoirs.—No. 67, art. 6 (Aug. 1820).
162. The Sketch Book.—No. 67, art. 8.
*163. Keats's Poetry.—No. 67, art. 10.
164. Quaker Poetry.—No. 68, art. 4 (Nov. 1820.)
165. Cornwall's Marcian Colonna.—No. 68, art. 11.
166. Byron's Marino Faliero.—No. 70, art. 1 (July 1821).
167. Southey's Vision of Judgement; Laureate Hexameters.—No. 70, art. 9.
168. Bowdler's Family Shakespeare.—No. 71, art. 3 (Oct. 1821).
*169. Madame de Staël.—No. 71, art. 4.
*170. Byron's Tragedies.—No. 72, art. 5 (Feb. 1822).
*171. The Fortunes of Nigel.—No. 73, art. 8 (June 1822).[2]
*172. Simond's Switzerland.—No. 74, art. 1 (Nov. 1822).
*173. Bracebridge Hall.—No. 74, art. 3.
174. French Poetry.—No. 74, art. 6.
175. Wordsworth's Tour on the Continent.—No. 74, art. 8.
176. Moore and Byron.—No. 75, art. 2 (Feb. 1823).
177. Cobbett's Cottage Economy.—No. 75, art. 5.

[1] 'I have just got done with another *Review*. I have more vamping and patching than writing. That of Rogers' little poem and Campbell's specimens are all I have written wholly; though there is more of my hand than there should be in the very long article on the abuse of charities' (Letter to Charles Wilkes, May 5, 1819; *Life*, ii. 187). No. 62, art. 12, 'Education Committee, and Abuse of Charities.'

[2] 'I have been lazy, and wrote only Nigel, and part of the first article' (Letter to Charles Wilkes, Sept. 22, 1822; *Life*, ii. 212). No. 73, art. 1, 'Memoirs of the Reign of George II.'

*178. Secondary Scottish Novels.—No. 77, art. 9 (Oct. 1823).
179. Dr. Meyrick on Ancient Armour.—No. 78, art. 4 (Jan. 1824).
180. Brodie's Constitutional History.—No. 79, art. 5 (March, 1824).
181. Malcolm's Central India.—No. 80, art. 1 (July, 1824).
182. Dr. Lyall on Russia.—No. 80, art. 9.
*183. Sketches of India, and Scenes in Egypt and Italy.—No. 81, art. 2 (Oct. 1824).
*184. Campbell's Theodric, and other Poems.—No. 82, art. 1 (Jan. 1825).
*185. Goethe's Wilhelm Meister.—No. 84, art. 7 (Aug. 1825).
*186. Pepys's Memoirs.—No. 85, art. 2 (Nov. 1825).
187. Combe's System of Phrenology.—No. 88, art. 1 (Sept. 1826).
*188. Moore's Life of Sheridan.—No. 89, art. 1 (Dec. 1826).
*189. Memoirs of the Emperor Baber.—No. 91, art. 2 (June 1827).
*190. O'Driscol's History of Ireland.—No. 92, art. 7 (Oct. 1827).
*191. Lord Collingwood's Correspondence.—No. 94, art. 5 (May 1828).
*192. Irving's Life and Voyages of Columbus.—No. 95, art. 1 (Sept. 1828).
193. Atherstone's Fall of Nineveh ; a Poem.—No. 95, art. 3.
*194. Bishop Heber's Journal.—No. 96, art. 2 (Dec. 1828).
*195. Felicia Hemans.—No. 99, art. 2 (Oct. 1829).
196. Memoirs of Lady Fanshawe.—No. 99, art. 4.[1]
197. Naval Tactics—Breaking of the Enemy's Line.—No. 101, art. 1 (Apr. 1830).
*198. Memoirs of Sir James Mackintosh.—No. 125, art. 11 (Oct. 1835).
199. Wilberforce's Correspondence.—No. 145, art. 2 (Oct. 1840).
200. Watt or Cavendish ?—No. 175, art. 3 (Jan. 1848).

[1] 'The 98th number, which came out in June 1829, was the last he edited ; and, excepting three or four papers which he wrote long afterwards, the one on the Memoirs of Lady Fanshawe, published in October 1829, was the last he ever furnished as a regular contributor' (Cockburn, *Life*, i. 285). The number for June 1829 was not edited wholly by Jeffrey. Macvey Napier accepted the editorship at the end of May, and Jeffrey at once left the charge of the new number to his successor (*Correspondence of Macvey Napier*, p. 61).

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